

Aimard Gustave

The Flying Horseman



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NOTICE

Gustave Aimard was the adopted son of one of the most powerful Indian tribes, with whom he lived for more than fifteen years in the heart of the Prairies, sharing their dangers and their combats, and accompanying them everywhere, rifle in one hand and tomahawk in the other. In turn squatter, hunter, trapper, warrior, and miner, Gustave Aimard has traversed America from the highest peaks of the Cordilleras to the ocean shores, living from hand to mouth, happy for the day, careless of the morrow. Hence it is that Gustave Aimard only describes his own life. The Indians of whom he speaks he has known – the manners he depicts are his own.

CHAPTER I

THE STORM

We left the Marchioness de Castelmelhor and her daughter Eva prisoners of the Pincheyra.¹

Thanks to the presence of the strangers in the camp, no one came to trouble the solitude of the captives.

Towards the evening they were warned by a somewhat brief message to make all their preparations, so as to be ready to commence a journey at the first signal.

The baggage of the two ladies had been, strange to say, scrupulously respected by the partisans; it was therefore somewhat considerable, and required four mules to carry it. They were promised that beasts of burden should be placed at their disposal.

The night was dark; the moon, hidden by thick clouds, fringed with greyish tints, gave no light; the sky was black; dull sounds were carried on the wind, and, repeated by the echoes, awakened the wild beasts in the depth of their secret lairs.

A funereal silence reigned over the camp, where all the fires were extinguished; the sentinels were mute, and their long motionless shadows stood out in relief from the darker tints of the surrounding hills. Towards four o'clock in the morning, when

¹ See "The Insurgent Chief," same publishers.

the horizon began to be tinged by greyish streaks of light, the noise of horses was heard.

The captives understood that the moment of their departure had come.

They had passed the night in prayer, without sleep having come for a single minute to close their eyelids.

At the first knock at their door they opened it.

A man entered; it was Don Pablo. A thick cloak enveloped him, and a broad-brimmed hat was pulled over his eyes.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"We are," laconically answered the marchioness.

"Here are your horses, ladies," said the Pincheyra; "will you mount?"

"Are we to leave immediately?" ventured the marchioness.

"It must be so, Madame," answered Don Pablo, respectfully; "we are threatened with a storm, and any delay might cause us serious injury."

"Would it not be better to defer our journey for some hours?" pursued the marchioness.

"You do not know our Cordilleras, my lady," answered the Pincheyra, smiling. "A storm of two hours generally occasions such disasters that the means of communication are stopped for weeks; but for that matter I am completely at your orders."

The marchioness did not reply, and was at once escorted to the horses which awaited them.

The two ladies were placed about the centre of a troop

formed by some twenty horsemen. By a remarkable refinement of courtesy on the part of uncultivated soldiers, Don Pablo had placed two horsemen to the right of the ladies, in order to preserve them from a fall during the darkness.

A group of a dozen horsemen, separated from the body of the troop, proceeded in advance as pioneers.

Notwithstanding the precarious situation in which she found herself, and the apprehensions by which her mind was harassed, the marchioness experienced a certain satisfaction, and an indefinable feeling of joy, to find herself at last out of the camp of the bandits.

Don Pablo, in order no doubt to avoid annoying the ladies, kept with the advanced guard, and, as soon as the day had become light enough to direct his course with safety, the two horsemen placed near the ladies were removed, so that the latter enjoyed a degree of liberty, and could talk to each other without fear of their words being heard.

"Mother," said Doña Eva, "does it not seem strange to you, that since our departure from Casa-Frama, Señor Sebastiao Vianna has not come near us."

"Yes; this conduct on the part of an intimate friend does appear to me singular; however, we must not be in a hurry. Perhaps Don Sebastiao has reasons for keeping aloof."

"Don Sebastiao ought to know how anxious we are to receive news of my father. I confess I am more concerned about it than I can explain."

"My dear, our parts are changed," said the marchioness; "it is you who fear, and I who hope."

"That's true, mother. I have misgivings about this journey. The warnings of Don Emile; his precipitate departure; what Don José told you yesterday, and even the courteous manner of Don Pablo, and the attentions which he heaps upon us, increase my suspicions. The more we advance in this direction, the more I am disquieted. Is it presentiment, or low spirits? I cannot tell you, mother."

"You are mad, Eva," answered the marchioness; "your presentiments arise from low spirits. What can we have further to fear. The men in whose hands we now are are completely masters of our fate."

At this moment the gallop of a horse was heard; the ladies turned, and a horseman passed rapidly, slightly jolting against them, doubtless on account of the narrowness of the path.

But quickly as this man had passed, he had time to skilfully throw on the knees of the marchioness a Book of Hours, bound in red morocco, and closed by clasps in chased gold.

The marchioness uttered a cry of astonishment, as she placed her hand on the book.

This prayer book was the one she had given some days before to the young painter. How was it that he returned it to her in such a singular way?

His pace had been so rapid, and the brim of his hat had so thoroughly concealed his face, that the marchioness did not

recognise him.

We have said that the two ladies were almost alone; in fact, the soldiers walked at some distance before and behind. The marchioness assured herself that no one observed them, and opened the book.

A note, folded in two, was placed at the first page; this note, written in pencil, was in French, and signed Emile Gagnepain.

The two ladies at once recognised the writing of the painter; both spoke French a little, and they did not experience any trouble in reading the letter. Its contents were as follows: —

"They are deceiving you, while they deceive themselves; the bandit is of good faith in the treason of which he is an accomplice, without knowing it. Whatever you see, whatever you hear, manifest no surprise. Do not offer any resistance, do not ask any explanation; I am watching over you; all that is possible to do I will attempt: I have to take revenge on the man to whom you are about to be given up, in a few hours. I shall be more than a match for the deceiver. We shall see who is the more cunning, he or I."

"Do not keep this paper, which might compromise you. Have confidence in God, and trust to the devotion of the man who has already delivered you once. Especially, I urge you not to be astonished at anything."

"EMILE GAGNEPAIN."

When Doña Eva had ascertained the purport of the note, on a sign from her mother, she tore it into minute fragments, and scattered them by degrees on the road.

For some time the prisoners remained pale, motionless, and speechless, weighed down by this horrible disillusion.

"You were right, my daughter," at last said the marchioness; "your presentiments were true; it was I who was mad to suppose that fate was weary of persecuting us."

"Mother," answered Doña Eva, "it is better for us to have the certainty of misfortune than to continue to buoy ourselves up with chimeras. In warning us, Don Emile has rendered us an immense service. When the blow with which we are threatened shall fall, thanks to him, we shall be prepared to receive it; besides, does he not assure us that all is not yet lost? He has a brave heart; he will save us, mother. And then the fashion in which this book has come to us – does not even that prove that we have one friend?"

"Alas! Dear child, what can I do? Nothing, if not strictly follow the counsel our friend gives us. Unhappily, he is struggling single-handed; he will be lost, without saving us."

"No, mother; Don Emile has doubtless taken his precautions. You have already seen how he works; you know how prudent he is."

"Prudence and courage are not sufficient. Power alone can give success, and, unhappily, it is power that fails us. He is isolated, without a friend; in a country, the language of which he can hardly speak. Oh," she cried, with feverish energy, "if I alone were in the power of these wretches! If I did not tremble for you, my child, I should long since have finished with these tigers –

these cowardly and heartless monsters who are not ashamed to torture women."

"Calm yourself, mother."

"You are right, my daughter," she said.

Doña Eva leaned towards her mother, threw her arms around her, and kissed her several times.

"You are brave and courageous, mother," she said; "I am proud and happy to be your daughter."

Meanwhile, for some little time the sky had taken a threatening appearance; the sun had lost its brilliancy, and only appeared drowned in copper-coloured clouds, which drifted rapidly, and concealed its disc. The heat was suffocating, the atmosphere heavy; without a breath of air, the trees trembled from root to summit. A yellowish vapour rose from the chasms of the rocks, by degrees condensed, and enveloped the landscape as with an ominous winding sheet. The birds wheeled in long flights, above the chasms, uttering discordant cries, and at intervals were heard rumblings of bad omen. All appeared to presage the approach of a storm.

Suddenly – a horseman approached; they recognised Don Pablo Pincheyra; the soldier made signs as he galloped, and uttered cries that the great distance prevented them from understanding, although it was evident that he gave them warning.

"Are you good horsewomen?" he asked, as he reached them; "Do you feel yourselves capable of keeping your seats with the

horses galloping at their utmost speed?"

"If it must absolutely be so, yes, señor," answered the marchioness.

"Listen! the moment is critical. Before an hour the storm will have burst upon us; if it overtakes us here, we are lost; it will envelope us in its whirlwind, and twist us like wisps of straw. I do not guarantee to save you, but I will do all that I can towards success. Will you have faith in me?"

"Command, señor!"

"Well, spur your horses, and give them the rein. Ahead, then, and God help us!"

"God help us!" repeated the two ladies, crossing themselves.

"Santiago! ah! Santiago!" cried Don Pablo, putting the spurs to the flanks of his horse.

We have said that the travellers followed the meanderings of a path on the flanks of an abrupt mountain. But unless a person has himself traversed the new world, it is impossible to make sure of what, in these wild countries, is honoured by the name of a road. One of our village paths, separating fields, is certainly more safe and practicable than some American roads. The path of which we speak, and which served at this time as a track for travellers, had originally been marked out by wild beasts. The men had adopted it from the beginning of the war of independence, as it formed the only means of reaching the plain of Casa-Frama, the headquarters of the Pincheyras; the latter had naturally taken good care to make it, we will not say convenient, but at all events

practicable for others than themselves. It was six feet wide in its widest parts, and often it narrowed to about two feet; from time to time it was interrupted by ravines, hollowed by the torrents formed from the melting of the snow – ravines which it was often necessary to leap at a single bound, at the risk of personal injury, or to cross on stones rendered slippery by the green waters. The ground was rugged, and obstructed nearly everywhere by pieces of rock or shrubbery. To the right it was bounded by a precipice of immense depth, and to the left by a wall of granite, which rose nearly perpendicularly, it was by such a road as this that the two ladies and their escort were obliged to gallop at full speed.

Ravines, ditches, and bogs were passed with giddy rapidity in this, desperate flight; the sun was without heat and without rays, like a ball of yellowish copper; the clouds lowered more and more, and ominous sounds rose mournfully from the depths of the chasms.

The travellers galloped without exchanging a word, desperately urging forward their horses whose efforts appeared almost supernatural.

Suddenly the voice of Don Pablo was heard.

"Halt!" he cried; "Alight, and throw yourselves on your faces. If you value your lives, make haste."

There was in the sound of his voice such an accent of anguish, that the bravest felt themselves tremble.

But all knew that the accomplishment of the order which they had just received was a matter of life and death. By a desperate

effort they reined up their horses short; two or three cries of agony, followed by the harsh sounds of several falls, were heard.

They came from the horsemen, whose horses had, becoming restive, stumbled over the edge of the path.

These horrible yells passed unperceived; the instinct of self-preservation was too powerful for anyone to care for others than himself.

In an instant all the horsemen had alighted, and were lying on the ground near their horses, which, instinctively understanding the danger had also crouched themselves on the path, burying their nostrils, and presenting their croup to the tempest.

"The hurricane! The hurricane!" cried the Pincheyra, in a loud clear voice; "Hold on to anything that you can seize!"

All of a sudden, a horrible rumbling was heard, and the wind was let loose with such extraordinary fury, that the mountain seemed to tremble as if it had been shaken by an earthquake. A horrible squall swept the valley with a roaring sound, and for some minutes separating the veil of fog.

Don Pablo half raised himself up at the risk of being carried away like a dry leaf, by the whirlwind which was raging, twisting, and tearing up the trees as though they were wisps of straw, and carrying them away in wild disorder, with a rapid but certain glance, the soldier explored the scene; then he assured himself that but a few steps farther, after a rather gentle descent, the path suddenly widened, and formed a platform of about three or four yards.

It was this spot towards which all the efforts of the soldiers had been directed. Once arrived in the valley, the situation would not be so critical.

It was necessary, then, that come what might, they should reach the valley.

Only, at the first terrible shock of the tempest, which in these wild regions assumes such formidable proportions, an avalanche had been detached from the summit of the mountain, and had been precipitated from rock to rock with a frightful crash, dragging with it the earth, the underwood, and the trees which were in its way, and blocking up the path.

The case was so much the more desperate as the storm redoubled its violence, and the darkness had fallen thicker.

But the Pincheyra was one of those iron-hearted men who took no account of apparently impossible things. Born in the mountains, he had often struggled face to face with the tempest, and always he had come forth a conqueror from this gigantic struggle.

To attempt to rise and walk would have been madness; the soldier did not dream of it for a moment. Taking in his hand the knife from his right pocket, in order to give himself a hold, and planting it in the ground, the hardy mountaineer began to crawl gently, and with precaution, on his knees and elbows by the side of the ruins massed across the path.

At every step he stopped, and lowered his head to allow the squall around him to pass.

It required nearly an hour for him to traverse a distance of less than sixty yards. During this time his companions remained motionless, holding on to the ground.

At last Don Pablo reached the spot on which the avalanche had fallen. He looked around.

Brave as the soldier was, he could not repress a cry of anguish at the terrible spectacle.

The rocks over which the path was traced, torn away by the fall of the avalanche, had in some places given way for a space of more, than six yards, and had rolled over the precipice, opening a frightful chasm.

The ruins left by the avalanche were composed in a great measure of trees, and fragments of rock, which, entangled together, and massed, so to speak, by the branches and the underwood, formed a thick wall on the very edge of the gulf.

It was of no use thinking of forcing the passage with horses and mules.

The soldier with rage struck with his fist the obstacle that he could not destroy, and proceeded to rejoin his companions. After having cast a last look on the chasm, he prepared himself to retreat, when suddenly he thought he heard a sharp and prolonged cry, like that used by the mountaineers of all countries to communicate between themselves, often at considerable distances.

Don Pablo stopped suddenly and listened, but a considerable lapse of time passed, during which he could hear nothing but the

horrible sounds of the storm. The soldier supposed that he had been the sport of an illusion, but suddenly the same cry, stronger and nearer, reached his ear, "Good God!" he cried, "Are other Christians lost in the mountains, amidst this horrible tempest?"

He stood for some moments, and cast a searching glance around.

CHAPTER II

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

"I am deceived," he murmured, after a few seconds of reflection; "these mountains are deserted, no one would dare to venture so near the Casa-Frama."

At this moment he felt that someone touched him slightly on the shoulder. He turned round trembling; a man had joined him, and was crouching behind him.

It was Don Zeno Cabral.

Since the departure from the camp, the soldier had continually remained in the advanced guard with the three Spaniards, in order to escape the looks of the two ladies, by whom he did not wish to be recognised till the last moment.

"Ah, 'tis you, Don Sebastiao," said Don Pablo; "what do you think of our situation?"

"It is bad – very bad indeed; however, I do not think it desperate," coldly answered the soldier.

"I am persuaded, on the contrary, that it is desperate."

"It may be so; but we are not yet dead."

"No; but pretty near to it."

"Have you thought of a means to escape from the bad position in which we are?"

"I have thought of a thousand; but I have not thought of one

which is practicable."

"That is because you have not thought in the right direction, my dear sir. In this world, you know as well as I do, that as long as the heart beats in the breast, there is some resource left, however critical may be the position in which we are placed. The remedy exists. Shall I aid you in doing so?"

"Well! I do not stand on my self-love," answered Don Pablo slightly smiling; "but I believe we shall have difficulty in finding the remedy."

"I am a bold man, as you are yourself. My pride revolts at the thought of dying a ridiculous death in this mousetrap, and I wish to escape – that's all."

"By Jove! You please me by speaking like that; you are really a charming companion."

"You flatter me, señor."

"No. I tell you what I think; rely on me as I rely on you, and we shall do wonders, I am sure."

"Keep your mind easy; we shall do our best, and if we fail, it will only be after having disputed our life inch by inch in a desperate struggle. But first, where are we?"

"We are at a few steps from the Valle del Tambo, where we should already have been in safety a long time ago, had it not been for this cursed avalanche."

"Very well – but," stopping himself suddenly; "did you not hear something?" asked he.

"Yes," answered the Pincheyra; "several times I have heard

that noise strike on my ear."

"By Jove! And you have told me nothing of it."

"I feared that I was deceived; besides, you know that the country we are traversing is a desert, and that no one can be here."

"We are here, though, eh?"

"That is not a reason; we are at home, or nearly so."

Don Zeno smiled with irony.

"That is possible; however, till we find to the contrary, let us act as if we were certain of meeting someone."

"If there were other travellers in the neighbourhood, would they not find themselves in the same situation as us, if not worse; and what you take for cries to help us may probably be, on the contrary, cries of distress."

"That is why we ought to assure ourselves of the truth."

"You are right; answer, then, if you think proper."

"Let us wait for a new cry, in order to assure ourselves as much as possible of the direction we ought to turn to in answering."

"Be it so, let us wait," answered the Pincheyra.

They stretched themselves again on the ground, their ears to the earth, listening with the greatest anxiety.

The situation momentarily became more critical; already several horses had been precipitated into the gulf, and it was with extreme difficulty that men and horses could resist the efforts of the tempest, which every moment threatened to carry them away.

However, after some minutes, which appeared to be an age, the two men again heard the cry.

This time it appeared nearer; it was sharp and perfectly distinct.

"It is a cry to help us," said Don Zeno, with joy.

And placing his two hands at the corners of his mouth, so as to carry his voice, he immediately answered by a cry not less shrill, which swept on the wind, echoed and re-echoed, to die away at a great distance.

"You are sure that is a cry to help us that we have just heard?" said the Pincheyra.

"Yes, thank God, it is," answered Zeno Cabral; "and now let us to work, for if we escape from here, master, we shall escape safe and sound; you may take my word for it."

Don Pablo shook his head sadly.

"You still doubt," pursued the hardy partisan in a tone of disdain. "Perhaps you are afraid?"

"Yes, I am afraid," candidly said the Pincheyra; "and I do not think there is anything humiliating in that avowal. I am but a man after all – very weak, and very humble before the anger of God; I cannot prevent my nerves from trembling, nor my heart from sinking."

Zeno Cabral held out his hand to him with a sympathising smile.

"Excuse me, Don Pablo," said he, in a gentle voice, "for having spoken to you as I have. A man must be really brave to avow so candidly that he is afraid."

"Thank you, Don Sebastiao," answered the Pincheyra,

affected more than he wished to show. "Act, order, I will be the first to obey you."

"Above all, let us rejoin our companions; we want their aid and their counsel; let us make haste."

The two men then rejoined their companions, crawling on elbows and knees, with the same difficulty they had previously experienced; for although the weather began to brighten, the wind had not ceased to howl with fury, and to sweep the path.

In a few words, Don Pablo Pincheyra put his adherents in possession of the facts of the situation, and imparted to them the feeble hope he himself possessed. All energy had been crushed within them, and they awaited death with stolid apathy.

"There is nothing to expect from these brutes," said Zeno Cabral, with disdain: "fear has neutralised all human sentiments."

"What is to be done, then?" murmured the partisan.

"If it only depended on you and me," pursued Don Zeno – "strong, determined, and active as we are, we should soon know how to escape this peril; but I do not wish to abandon these unhappy Women."

"I completely share your opinion on that matter."

"So I can depend upon you?"

"Most thoroughly; but what can we do?"

"Bethink yourself; you know these mountains well, do you not?"

"They do not possess a gorge – a hidden retreat – that I have

not twenty times explored."

"Good! You are sure, then, of the place where we are?"

"Oh, perfectly."

"The path we follow, is it the only one that leads to the place where you wish us to go?"

"There is another, but to take that, it would be necessary we retrace our steps for at least four leagues."

"We could never accomplish that. What direction does this path take?"

"Upon my word, I cannot positively tell you."

"We have only one recourse left," pursued Don Zeno; "it is to join the man whose cry to help us has been several times heard."

"I should think nothing better; but how shall we descend the precipice?"

"This is my project. We will take all the lassos of those poltroons, and tie them end to end; one of us will tie the end of these round his body, and will attempt the descent, whilst his companions will hold the rope in his hand, letting it out only in such a way as, precarious as the support may be, it may serve to maintain the equilibrium of the one who descends. Do you agree with it?"

"Yes," decisively answered the Pincheyra, "but on one condition."

"What is it?"

"It is that it shall be I who descends."

"No, I cannot admit that condition; but I propose another."

"Let us hear it."

"Time presses; we must make an end of this. Every minute that we lose brings us nearer death. Let chance decide it."

The partisan drew from the pockets of his trousers a purse full of gold, and placed it between himself and the Pincheyra.

"I do not know what this purse contains," said he, "I swear it. Odd or even! If you guess, you descend; if not, you give up the place to me."

Notwithstanding the prostration in which they were, some of the adventurers, excited by the irresistible attraction of this strange game, played in the midst of a horrible tempest, and of which death was the stake, half rose up, and fixed their ardent gaze on the two.

Don Pablo cried Even, and then the purse was opened.

"Forty-seven!" cried Don Zeno, in a joyful accent; "I have gained."

"True," answered Don Pablo; "do as you wished to do!"

Without losing a moment the partisan seized the lassos from the Pincheyras, tied them firmly together, and after having fixed one of the ends round his girdle, he gave the other to Don Pablo, and prepared to commence his hazardous descent.

The countenance of Don Zeno was grave and sad.

"I confide these two poor ladies to you," said he in a low voice; "if, as is probable, I shall not be able to resist the strength of the tempest, promise me to watch over them till your last breath."

"Go boldly; I swear to you to do it."

"Thank you," merely answered Don Zeno.

He knelt down, addressed to Heaven a mental prayer; then, seizing his knife in one hand, and his dagger in the other:

"God help me," said he firmly, and in a crawling attitude he approached the edge of the precipice.

Don Zeno commenced his descent with the courage of a man who, while he has resolutely risked the sacrifice of his life, nevertheless applies all the energy of his will to the success of his perilous enterprise.

The edge of the precipice was less steep than it appeared from above. Although with great difficulty, the partisan succeeded in maintaining his equilibrium pretty well, by holding on to the grass and shrubbery which were within his reach.

Don Zeno continued to descend, as upon a narrow ledge, which seemed insensibly to retreat, and upon which he could only maintain himself by a desperate effort. Then, having reached a tree which had thrown out its branches horizontally, he disappeared in the midst of the foliage, and after a moment the adventurers felt that the tension of the lasso, which they had given out inch by inch, had suddenly ceased, Don Pablo drew towards him the cord; it came without resistance, floating backwards and forwards to the sport of the wind.

Don Zeno had let go his hold. It was in vain that the adventurers tried to discover the young man. A considerable lapse of time passed; they could not discover him; then all of a sudden, the tree, in the branches of which he had disappeared,

oscillated slowly, and fell with a noise down the precipice.

"Oh," cried Don Pablo in despair, throwing himself back, "the unhappy man; he is lost!"

Meanwhile the partisan, cool and calm, looking at danger in its full extent, but regarding it, thanks to his habits of desert life, in a common-sense light, had continued his terrible journey, step by step, only advancing slowly, and with precaution.

He thus attained the tree of which we have spoken, and which formed nearly a right angle with the precipice, just below the spot where the avalanche had blocked up the path, although between the tree and the other edge of the precipice, the distance was pretty considerable. However, Zeno Cabral, after mature reflection, did not despair of getting past it.

To do this, he relieved himself of the lasso, which had only become useless to him.

Encircling the trunk of the tree, he raised himself as far as the principal branch, and making use of it as a bridge, at the same time holding on to the upper branches, he advanced towards its extremity.

But scarcely had he reached halfway the length of the branch, than he perceived with horror that the tree, broken by the fall of the avalanche, oscillated under him. A shudder of terror ran through his veins; his hair stood on end; a cold sweat broke upon his temples; his look was riveted, spite of himself, upon the yawning gulf which opened beneath, ready to bury him; giddiness seized him; he felt that he was lost, and closed his

eyes, murmuring a last prayer. But at the moment when he was about to abandon himself and fall into the gulf, the instinct of life suddenly awoke. By a last effort of will he subdued the giddiness, ordered, so to speak, his arteries to cease to beat, and resolving to try a last effort, he darted along the branch which bent more and more under him, sprang ahead and reached the opposite edge of the precipice, at the very moment when the tree, suddenly losing its balance, rolled into the gulf with a horrible sound.

Weakened by the terrible effort he had been obliged to make, and not yet knowing whether he was lost or saved, the young man remained for some minutes stretched on the ground, pale, panting, his eyes starting; not caring to think of the miraculous way in which he had escaped from a nearly inevitable death, or to stir – so much did he still seem to feel the ground stealing from under him.

However, by degrees he became calmer and more rational.

The place where he was was a kind of platform, situated a few yards below the path, which at that place declined gradually as far as the valley.

Although the position of the partisan was much improved, it was still very dangerous. In fact, the side of the precipice, above which he was literally suspended, rose perpendicularly, and it was impossible to scale it. Zeno Cabral had only succeeded in changing his mode of death. If he no longer feared to be precipitated to the bottom of the abyss, he ascertained by a look the certainty that, unless by some extraordinary help, he could

not quit the place where he was, and that, consequently, if he could not blow his brains out, or plunge his poignard into his heart, he was condemned to die miserably of hunger – a prisoner on the pedestal that he had succeeded in reaching.

The partisan supported himself against the granite wall, to shelter himself against the violence of the wind, which whirled about the chasm with ominous sounds; and although he had a conviction of his powerlessness, he nevertheless thought over in his mind a means of escaping from the frightful death which threatened him.

For some minutes he thus remained, his head drooping, his eyes fixed on the rock; then he mechanically raised his head and made a gesture of terror. An enormous bald vulture had swept down from the extremity of the platform, and looked at him with a sinister expression.

Brave as the young man was, he could not support the cold and sea-green eye of the hideous bird, which appeared to fascinate him. By an instinctive movement he seized from his girdle one of his pistols, and discharged it at the vulture, which immediately flew away with a harsh and discordant cry.

The noise of the explosion, re-echoed from chasm to chasm like so many thunderclaps, only gave place to silence, when it had reached the regions of eternal snow, where it died amidst their majestic solitudes.

But scarcely had the sound ceased, than the cry to help him, which had already struck the ear of the partisan, resounded again.

The young man regained hope. Gathering all his powers in order to give greater effect to his voice, he answered by a similar cry. Then immediately the cry was repeated, but this time above him.

Convinced that men were near him, and not knowing what means to use to inform them of his whereabouts, Zeno Cabral discharged his second pistol; nearly at the same time a formidable explosion burst over his head; then, when silence had been re-established, a sonorous and clear voice twice cried out to him:

"Courage! Courage!"

Zeno Cabral was compelled to support himself against a rock to prevent himself from falling; a convulsive trembling agitated his limbs; a harsh cry escaped from his panting breast; his body lost that agitation that fear had given it, and he hid his head in his hands, and melted into tears.

If he had not wept he would have gone mad, or he would have succumbed to the repeated attacks of the poignant emotions which for some hours had continually assailed him, and had at last crushed his energy, and almost annihilated his will.

Ten minutes – ten ages – thus passed without the partisan perceiving anything to induce him to believe that anyone was watching to save him. Anxiety began again to weigh heavily on his heart, when suddenly he saw above the crest of the precipice, the copper-coloured head of an Indian.

"Here I am!" cried he, immediately advancing.

"We see you," answered someone. "Are you wounded; can

you help yourself?"

"I am not wounded, thank God," said he; "and I have all my energies."

"So much the better, for the ascent will be difficult. We will throw you a lasso; you must tie it to your body, and we will draw you up, as you do not appear to be in a position to climb, with a cord."

"Throw me down cord. I will keep it away from the edge, and fix it firmly at a certain distance, so as not to be swayed about."

"Well! Wait; we will pay you out the cord."

The Indian disappeared, but almost immediately a pretty thick cord, with knots a little apart from each other, descended slowly. They had attached a stone of a good weight to the end, to prevent it from drifting about. However, the wind was still so high that notwithstanding this precaution it was so driven about as to seriously disquiet the young man.

However, when the stone touched the platform, either from its weight, or because the storm had lost its intensity, it was easy enough for the young man to take it. He immediately occupied himself in fixing it firmly in the fissure of the rock.

Then the young man, for whom this ascent, perilous as it would have been for anyone else, was but child's play, thanks to his strength and skill, seized the cord and mounted.

Four men received him, when he put his foot on the path.

"Welcome to terra firma!" said the one who appeared to be the master, laughing and holding out his hand.

"Thank you," answered Zeno Cabral, and at last, overcome by so many emotions; he sank, half fainting, into the arms of his unknown friends.

They, with the gentlest solicitude, used every means in their power to restore his failing energies, with what success we shall see later on.

CHAPTER III

THE VALLE DEL TAMBO

The Valle del Tambo is a narrow valley shaded by beautiful trees, and almost wholly sheltered from the storms which rage on the mounts. It is a favourite halt for travellers, and is provided with a kind of little house of solid stones; where people shelter themselves from the rain, wind, or snow.

These lodges, or tambos, are met with frequently in the high regions of the Cordilleras. When the Spanish government was powerful in these countries, it ordered the construction of them on a large scale.

At the present day, thanks to the carelessness of the governments which have succeeded to that of Spain, the majority of these tambos are in ruins.

When Don Santiago Pincheyra, after the conversation with Emile Gagnepain, which we have previously recorded, had set out with his partisan, to return to Casa-Frama, the painter and his servant had sat down before their watch fire.

The news that Pincheyra, urged by a feeling of gratitude, had given to the young Frenchman, was of the highest importance. Unhappily, this information arrived too late to enable him to warn the ladies, and to place them on their guard against the dangers which threatened them.

In vain he racked his brain to find a means of honourably escaping from the difficult position in which he found himself, when Tyro rudely interrupted his reflections.

"Well, master," said he, "we are worrying our brains to little purpose. I will take the responsibility of acquainting these ladies."

"You, Tyro? How will you do it?"

"Oh, leave that to me. I will answer for everything. Just write a letter to the marchioness, place it in something that she will immediately recognise, and you may depend upon it I will convey it to her."

"You promise it?"

"On the word of Tyro."

"Good: I will write the letter. I have got a Book of Hours, which the marchioness gave me a few days ago. She will not fail to recognise it."

"That is right, master. Write immediately, that I may the sooner depart."

While they were thus speaking, the Guarani had lighted a torch, by the light of which the young man traced a few lines on a leaf of his memorandum book. Then he folded the paper, placed it in the prayer book, and closed the clasp.

While his master was writing, Tyro had saddled his horse, so that he was ready as soon as his master.

"Now," said he, "do not be uneasy, master. Remain quietly here, and you will soon see me again."

"Go then, but be prudent."

The Guarani spurred his horse, and broke into a gallop. He now disappeared in the darkness, and the sound of his horse's feet ceased to be heard.

The young man gave a sigh, and went sadly to lie down in the tambo, where, notwithstanding the anxiety to which his mind was a prey, it was not long before he soundly slept.

Meanwhile Tyro had set out. The brave Indian, without troubling himself about the night, the thick darkness of which enveloped him, galloped at full speed in the direction of Casa-Frama. The plan which he had conceived was extremely simple.

At about four or five leagues from the entrance of the camp, the road passed through a tolerably large defile, the sides of which were covered with thick shrubbery. It was in this place the Indian made a halt. He entered the thicket, hid himself behind the trees and the shrubs, alighted, and having covered with his girdle the nostrils of his horse, he watched.

His body leaning forward, his eye and ear on the watch, he heard the sounds which the night wind brought him; and prepared to act as soon as the moment should arrive.

At last, a little before sunrise, at the moment when the darkness, struggled with a last effort against the daybreak, which paled the stars and tinged the heavens with greyish reflections, Tyro, whose eye had not been dosed for an instant, thought he heard a slight noise in the direction of Casa-Frama.

There was no room for mistake; it was the caravan which had

set out from the camp, and in the middle of which were the two ladies.

The Guarani advanced cautiously, and scarcely had the last horseman been descried in the darkness, than he left the wood, and proceeded in the same direction as the travellers, and imperceptibly approached the rearguard.

The first part of the Indian's plan had succeeded with greater ease than he could have dared to hope for; the second part alone remained – that is to say, the conveying the book of hours to the marchioness.

Tyro, affecting the sleepy pace of his companions, patted gently the horse which he held firmly by the bridle; and, without exciting any suspicion, drew nearer to the body of the troop.

His design was to reach the two ladies, and to slip the book in their hands, without being perceived, but he soon saw that this project was impracticable. The two ladies formed the centre of a group.

Tyro, however, was not discouraged.

There was not a moment to be lost. Any hesitation would have been perilous. The day began to advance.

The decision of the Guarani was immediately taken.

Placed at about ten paces behind the two ladies, regardless of what might happen to him, and determined at all hazards to accomplish his mission, he took advantage of a moment when the horsemen to the right and left of the prisoners had removed to some little distance; and giving his horse the rein, he darted

off at full gallop.

We have seen that, he succeeded in throwing the book to the marchioness.

Don Pablo Pincheyra, astonished at the unexpected appearance of this horseman, whom he had only seen as he passed, but who appeared to hint not to be part of his troop, prepared to follow him, to find out who he was, when suddenly another care came to change the current of his ideas, by constraining him to look after the safety of his companions. The tempest which had so long threatened them at last burst with extreme violence.

At the first breeze of the hurricane, Tyro understood that a danger, a hundred times more terrible than that from which he had just escaped, hung over his head. Exciting his horse, whose efforts were already prodigious; leaping ravines and bogs, at the risk of dashing himself to the bottom of precipices which he passed in his mad flight, he appeared to fly over this narrow and scarcely practicable path, and which the darkness, which suddenly spread over the mountains, rendered more perilous still.

Suddenly a terrible noise burst at a few paces from him, a cloud of dust enveloped him, his horse started and reared up on his hind legs balancing itself for some minutes on the very edge of the gulf. The Indian thought he was lost. By a prodigy of horsemanship, he gave him the bridle, plunged his spurs into the palpitating sides of the horse, and leant all his weight on the neck of the animal. The horse hesitated an instant, suddenly he

bounded forward, and made a few stumbling steps. Then his four legs gave way, he fell, and threw the Indian over his head.

Tyro raised himself, shattered and bruised by his fall, and looked anxiously around him. A frightful spectacle met his eyes. An enormous avalanche had detached itself from the summit of the mountain.

But by a providential circumstance, Tyro, thanks to the rapidity of his journey, had reached the valley. He was saved, but was separated from the travellers who followed him by a nearly impregnable barrier.

The young man hastened to run towards his horse, which had already got up.

Tyro patted him, and spoke to him to give him courage; but knowing the impossibility of mounting in the state of prostration in which he found the horse, he took him by the bridle and continued his route, dragging him after him.

Emile was a prey to the greatest anxiety. It was with joy that he received Tyro, and congratulated him warmly upon having returned safe and sound.

The young man trembled at the thought of the perils with which the two ladies were threatened.

"They must be saved," cried he with spirit.

"They are lost," said Tyro.

"Lost!" cried Emile with energy. "Nonsense! You cannot believe it; it is not possible."

"I do not doubt, master; I am sure."

"But no, you are deceived. I do not believe you. That would be too frightful. Doña Eva, so young, so beautiful, to perish thus – no, that cannot be."

"Alas! Master," said the Indian, with a sigh, "how often have I seen perish thus other young ladies as beautiful, and, without doubt, as much loved!" added he, in a low voice.

Several minutes passed, during which the two men remained mute and pensive; no other sound was heard than that of the hurricane which raged in the valley.

Then the Frenchman raised his head. His face was radiant; an expression of determined bravery was spread over his features; his eyes appeared to flash.

"If I am to be crushed against the rocks," he said in a firm voice, "I will not leave these unhappy ladies to die. Our fate is in the hands of God; whatever happens, I will try to succour them."

While speaking thus, the young man had risen, and walked resolutely towards the door of the tambo.

"Master, what would you do?" cried Tyro, throwing himself quickly before him; "You do not know what a storm is in the mountains; you expose yourself to a horrible death!"

"Be it so!" coolly responded the young man, trying to disengage himself; "But I shall do my duty."

"Your duty, master," cried the Indian with grief – "you will go to your death, that is all!"

"It is possible; but my resolution is irrevocably taken. Release me then, my brave Tyro, your efforts and your words to detain

me are useless."

"Do as you think proper, master," said the Indian; "let us try, then, since you wish it."

"I require nothing of you, my friend," replied he; "this regards me alone, you will remain here."

"Oh, master," replied the Indian in a tone of reproach, "what have I done that you should speak to me thus?"

"You have done nothing to me," my friend; "I am not angry with you. Only, I have no right to expose you, to satisfy one of my caprices, to a terrible death."

"Master," said the Indian in an earnest tone, "I am with you body and soul; where you go, I shall go; what you do, I shall do. You wish to try to save these travellers? Be it so; let us attempt it."

"You have misunderstood me, my friend. You have told me yourself, that I shall go to a certain death in attempting to aid these unhappy travellers; I have not wished that you, who are not concerned in it, should share these perils."

"Pardon, master," quickly interrupted the young man, "let us resume the question. I do not condemn or approve your project. You wish to put it into execution – very well. This is your desire, and I shall not discuss the point with you."

"Come then, since this is the case; but I leave to you to prove that I used no constraint with you."

"Certainly, my master, and whatever happens, be convinced that no reproach shall come from my lips."

A longer conversation became useless between the two men.

They understood each other. Notwithstanding the hurricane, they quitted the tambo, followed by the gauchos.

Thanks to the incline of the path, and to its width at the spot where it debouched into the valley, the injury caused by the avalanche, although very great, was not irreparable. That which the travellers could not attempt, because of the precarious situation in which they found themselves placed, the four men, by uniting their forces, had hopes of being able to accomplish; that is to say, that after three or four hours' very painful work, they were certain of re-establishing a provisional passage – solid enough, however, for the horses and beasts of burden to venture on.

They set themselves immediately to work, notwithstanding the efforts of the tempest, then in all its force, but of which the squalls, broken by the mountains, had not that intensity as on the road.

"While you work here to re-establish the passage," said Tyro, "I will go and occupy myself in taking care to warn the travellers whom we would save."

Without waiting for an answer, the Indian left.

We have shown how his appeals had been heard, and had moved Zeno Cabral to attempt a last effort.

When the partisan found himself at last upon firm earth, his first movement was to thank God for his marvellous deliverance; then tendering his hand to Emile, who, at the first glance, he perceived to be the master of those who had brought succour to him:

"Thank you, señor," he said; "thanks to you, I am saved; but there are other unhappy ones."

"I know it, caballero," interrupted the young man. "A numerous troop of travellers are at this moment still exposed to terrible danger; with the aid of God, we shall save them."

"You believe so?" joyously cried the partisan.

"I hope so, at all events, señor: for several hours already my companions and myself have been working. Come; your aid will not be useless."

Zeno Cabral followed him with readiness.

He gave utterance to a cry of joy, on perceiving the bridge which the painter had succeeded in throwing from one side to the other of the gulf.

The work was nearly finished; the plank alone remained to establish. This was the affair of half an hour.

"Do you think, now," asked the young man, "that your companions will risk themselves on this bridge?"

"Oh, that will be only play to them," responded the partisan.

"Cross the bridge, then; clear a passage through the ruins left by the avalanche. Then, arrived on the other side, you will only have to open in the earth heaped up on the rock a trench enough for a passage of a horse."

"Will you not come with me?"

"What's the good? Better that you should go alone. Our sudden presence would cause great surprise among your friends."

"That's reasonable; in the fainting state in which they are,

perhaps that would cause serious consequences. Au revoir, then, and to our speedy meeting."

The young man took the hand of the Frenchman a last time, and set out on the bridge, which he traversed in a minute.

Meanwhile the Pincheyras, who had had a moment's hope when they had seen Don Zeno Cabral, with such skill and such cool bravery, launch himself into the precipice to attempt to find a passage, suddenly felt that hope extinguished in their hearts, when all of a sudden the tree on which the adventurous young man was holding rolled into the abyss.

In vain Don Pablo, whose indomitable courage had not been cast down by this terrible blow, attempted at several times, now in chiding, then in exciting them, to galvanise his companions, and to awaken in them a spark of bravery. All was useless; the instinct of self-preservation, the last sentiment which stands in the human heart, and which supports it in the most horrible crises, was extinct in their hearts.

Don Pablo, disheartened by this torpor into which the soldiers had fallen, and acknowledging the impossibility of raising them from it, crouched at the foot of the barricade, and there, his arms crossed over his chest, awaited death.

The tempest had sensibly diminished; the sky had cleared up; the wind only blew in gusts, and the fog, as it dissipated, permitted them to descry the landscape, which presented so many features injured by the storm, and the desolate aspect of which, if it were possible, added more to the horror of the

situation in which the travellers were.

"We must have done with this," murmured Don Pablo; "since these brutes are incapable of helping us, and as terror paralyses them, I will leave them, if it must be so, to their fate; but, as I hope for heaven. I swear I will save these two unfortunate ladies."

Whilst speaking thus, the partisan raised himself, and, throwing around him a last look, he prepared to go to the ladies, who were lying in a fainting state.

On a sudden the branches of the barricade, pushed back by a vigorous hand, separated rudely behind him, and Don Zeno leaped into the path. At sight of him a total change took place in the troop. At the sight of Zeno Cabral, whom they believed to be dead, the partisans leaped up as though stricken by an electric shock, and hope, re-entering their breasts, gave them back all their courage.

Don Pablo had no occasion to order them to set themselves to work; they rushed on the barricade with a desperate ardour, and in less than a half-hour every obstacle had disappeared. The earth, the rocks, the very trees were thrown into the gulf, with the partisans' cries of joy exciting one another to see who should do the most work.

The horses and the mules, held by the bridle by their masters, crossed the bridge without much difficulty, and soon found themselves in safety in the valley.

A litter had been made to transport the two ladies, still fainting; they were placed in the tambo, on a bed of dry

leaves, covered with skins and cloaks, and then confided to the intelligent care of Tyro.

Don Pablo, perceiving his old prisoner, uttered a cry of surprise.

"What!" cried he, "you here, Don Emile?"

"As you see," answered the young man.

"Then it is to you that we owe our safety?"

"After God, it is to me that you owe it, señor."

The partisan looked at the Frenchman with admiration.

"Is it possible," murmured he, "that such great and noble natures exist? Don Emile," said he, "I have done you serious injury; I persecuted you during all the time that you were at Casa-Frama, without any real reason. My conduct has been despicable; you ought to hate me, and you save me!"

"Because, Don Pablo," answered the young man, "you are a man in the true sense of the word; because your faults are those necessitated by the life you lead; because every good feeling is not dead within you, and your heart is generous. I do not claim the right of being more severe than God, and of condemning you to perish, when a hope of saving you existed."

"This obligation that you impose on me, Don Emile, I accept with joy. You have a better opinion of me than I dared to have of myself. I will try to show myself, for the future, worthy of what you have done for me today."

"You were acquainted with one another?" said Don Zeno.

"A little," answered Don Pablo.

The conversation ceased here for the time. The partisans proceeded to arrange their camp, and to prepare their breakfast, of which, now that they were saved, they began to feel the want. Emotions, in the desert, for a time overcome hunger; the danger passed, hunger returns.

CHAPTER IV

DIPLOMACY

Meanwhile the storm had abated, the sky became cloudless, and the sun burst out with a warm glow that was very welcome.

Emile, after having confided the two ladies to the care of the Guarani, had left the tambo, oppressed by a sad apprehension.

At first, carried away by the vivacity of his disposition, he had, at the peril of his life, tried to save men threatened with a frightful death; but, the danger passed, all the difficulty of his position suddenly appeared to him.

The young man's position was critical; an event impossible to foresee had destroyed all his plans. The storm, in thus coming to the aid of the Pincheyras, obliged the Frenchman to adopt a system of dissimulation incompatible with his loyal character.

However, there was no other means than that; he must adopt it. The young man resigned himself to it – against his will, it is true – hoping that perhaps fate might weary of persecuting the two weak creatures whom he wished to serve.

A prey to by no means pleasurable thoughts, Emile, with his arms crossed behind his back, and his head leaning on his breast, paced with an agitated step the open space before the tambo, when he heard himself called several times in a loud voice.

He raised his head. Don Zeno and Don Pablo Pincheyra,

seated side by side on the banks of a ditch, made a sign to him to join them.

"What do these demons want with me?" murmured he, in his manner of speaking to himself in a low tone. "They are certainly two good specimens of scoundrels. Ah!" said he, with a sigh, "How happy was Salvator Rosa – he who could at his ease paint all the brigands that he met! What a splendid picture I could make here! What a magnificent landscape!"

Speaking thus, the young man directed his steps towards the two partisans, before whom he found himself just at the last word of his "aside." He bowed to them, with a smile on his face.

"You wish to speak to me, gentlemen?" said he. "Can I be of any service to you?"

"You can," answered Zeno Cabral, smiling, "render me a service for which I should be ever grateful."

"Although I am ignorant as to what you expect of me, and what is the service you are about to ask of me, I do not wish to abuse your confidence, and to deceive you. It is well that we should thoroughly understand our position."

"What do you mean, señor?" asked Don Zeno, with a start of surprise.

"I will explain. You doubtless do not recognise me, señor. I confess that at first, when I came to your help, I did not know who was the man whose life I had saved; but now I recognise you as Don – "

"Sebastiao Vianna, a Portuguese officer, a friend and aide-

de-camp of General the Marquis de Castelmelhor," quickly interrupted Don Zeno.

"Parbleu! Why hesitate? I by no means conceal my name; I have no reason for making a mystery of it. Don Pablo knows that – a devoted friend of the marchioness and her daughter – my mission has no other design than the conducting them safely to the general."

"There is nothing but what is very honourable in this mission," chimed in the Pincheyra, "and with God's help the colonel will accomplish it."

"I hope so," answered Don Zeno.

"Just so," answered the young man, taken aback by what he heard.

"Ah!" murmured he, "Whom do they think they are deceiving?"

"Is that all you wished to say?" continued Don Zeno.

"Yes, that is all," answered the painter, bowing.

"Very well," pursued the partisan with an agreeable smile, "I did not expect less from your courtesy; but what you do not wish to state, it is for me to make known, and to avow boldly."

"Your conduct towards me, Don Emile," he continued – "you see I remember your name – is so much the handsomer and more generous, inasmuch as mine, in appearance at least, is not in your estimation free from blame. At our first meeting, I wished, I believe, if my memory is faithful, to arrest you as a spy."

"I thank you for this frankness, señor," answered the young

man, smiling.

"You misunderstand me, caballero," pursued the partisan with animation, "and that does not surprise me. You cannot understand the strange and abnormal position that we Southern Americans occupy at this time. I speak decisively, because I expect a last service, or, if you prefer to call it so, a last proof of your generosity."

Emile Gagnepain was a thoroughly clear-sighted man. The deliberate manner of the partisan who, while passing lightly over the details, yet confessed his errors, pleased him by its very eccentricity.

"Speak, Don Sebastiao," he answered; "I shall be happy to render you the service that you expect, if it is in my power."

"I know it, and I thank you for it, señor. I will state what it is in a few words."

"Speak, señor," answered the young man, his curiosity excited by such long preambles.

Don Zeno appeared for some time a prey to uncertainty and indecision; but, overcoming his feelings, whatever they were, he cast a look to where Don Pablo Pincheyra was apathetically smoking a cigarette, without appearing in any way to concern himself with the conversation.

"Here is the fact in a few words," he said; "Don Pablo Pincheyra, my friend, has informed me that you accompanied the Marchioness de Castelmelhor and her daughter, when his brother conducted them to Casa-Frama."

"That is true," gravely answered the painter; "these ladies did me the honour to accept me as guide."

"Then you are devoted to them?" decisively asked the partisan. The painter did not wince; he suspected a snare.

"Pardon," he said, in a tone of kindness, impossible to describe. "Before going any further, let us understand each other thoroughly, caballero. You say, do you not, that I am devoted to these unfortunate ladies?"

"Is it not true?" added the Pincheyra.

"To a certain extent it is, señor. These ladies required aid; I was near them, and they claimed mine. To refuse them would neither have been gallant nor in good taste. I, therefore, acceded to their wishes; but you know as well as anyone, Don Pablo, that yesterday, having learnt that they had no further need of me, I took leave of them."

"Hum I that is awkward," murmured Zeno Cabral. "Had you, then, serious reasons for acting thus?"

"Not precisely, señor; I have always acted in good faith with these ladies."

There was a long silence between the three speakers. The tone of the young painter was so artless and decidedly frank, that Don Zeno, notwithstanding all his skill, could not ascertain whether he gave expression to his real thoughts, or was deceiving him.

"I am disheartened by what you tell me, as I intended to ask you to do me a service."

"With regard to these ladies?" said the young man, with

astonishment.

"A service for which, by the by, I should be extremely grateful."

"I do not see in what I can serve you, señor."

"But I do. Look here, my dear sir; we are playing with our cards under the table."

"I do not know why you speak thus, señor; my policy towards you should, I think, be sufficient to place me above suspicion of treachery," answered he.

"These ladies," Don Zeno continued, "whether rightly or wrongly, I will not discuss with you, imagine that they are surrounded by enemies determined on their destruction. Perhaps, if I presented myself to them, their mind, embittered by misfortunes, would see in me, whom they know but imperfectly, instead of a sure friend and a devoted servant, one of their enemies."

"Oh," cried the painter, haughtily, "what is that you are saying, señor? Are you not the aide-de-camp of General the Marquis de Castelmelhor?"

"That is true," answered the partisan, with embarrassment.

"Well, it seems to me, caballero, that that position ought to serve as a safeguard."

"Well, it probably would do so – at least I hope so. Unfortunately, reasons of the highest importance necessitate my trusting to someone else. That other – "

"Is to be me, is it not?" quickly interrupted the young man.

"That is what you wanted to propose, caballero?"

"Whom could I choose if not you, señor? – you who know these ladies, and they have full confidence in you."

"Unhappily, caballero, my consent is necessary in this matter, and I have already had the honour to say, if not to you, at least to Don Pablo, that I do not feel at all disposed to continue, in respect to these ladies, the part that I have played for nearly a month. I am much concerned for them, but I must withdraw my support from them."

This tirade was uttered by the young man with such comic desperation, that the two partisans could not prevent themselves from laughing.

"Come, come," answered Don Zeno; "you are an excellent companion, and I see with pleasure that I was not deceived in you. Reassure yourself; the mission that I wish to confide to you is by no means perilous."

"Hum! Who knows?" murmured the young man.

"I give you my word, as a gentleman," resumed Don Zeno, "that when you arrive you will be free, and nobody will molest you."

"Hum! Hum!" again murmured the young man.

"Ah!" suddenly exclaimed Don Pablo Pincheyra, rising. "Why, then, my dear Don Sebastiao, do you not continue the escort of these ladies?"

"Have I not acquainted you," responded Don Zeno, "with the message which was given to me by the cavalier who met us on

our first departure from the camp?"

"That is true," said Don Pablo, "I did not think of that. The message is important, then?"

"It could not be more so."

"Diable! Let us see, Don Emile," pursued the Pincheyra, in a conciliatory tone. "If I could, I would not hesitate to escort these two unfortunate ladies."

"You refuse me this service, then, caballero?" added Don Zeno.

"Well," said the young man, as if it had cost him a great deal to make this determination, "as you wish it, for this time I again consent to take upon myself an embarrassment of which I thought I was rid. I will escort these ladies."

Don Zeno made a gesture of joy which he immediately repressed.

"Thank you, caballero," said he. "Perhaps God will permit me, someday, to acquit myself of all that I owe you. Now that this affair is settled to our mutual satisfaction, allow me to take leave of you."

"Do you intend to depart so quickly then?"

"It must be. I cannot make too great haste. So, now that I have rested myself sufficiently for the various fatigues that I have for some time endured, I leave you, confiding in your loyal word, and convinced that you will act up to it."

"I shall fulfil my promise, señor."

"Thank you, caballero. I entirely reckon on you."

And after having amicably taken the hand of the young Frenchman, and having courteously bowed to Don Pablo, the partisan proceeded to rejoin his companions.

Don Zeno mounted his horse, made a last salute, and giving his horse the bridle, departed at full speed.

The painter followed him with his eyes as long as he could perceive him. Then, when at last the Montonero had disappeared behind the point of a rock, he gave a sigh of relief.

"That is one; now for the other? As to the latter, I think it will not be very difficult."

Don Pablo, still seated on the hillock of which he had made a seat, continued to smoke his cigarette.

The young man seated himself at his side, considered a moment, and placing his hand on the other's shoulder:

"Vive Dieu! Don Pablo," cried he with vigour; "For A month past I have lived in your camp; I have seen you accomplish marvellous things; but this far surpasses all the others."

"Eh!" said the partisan. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing. I render you homage, that is all."

"Homage!" repeated Don Pablo; "Why?"

"What makes you say why? Parbleu! I did not expect such an excess of modesty."

"Are we speaking in enigmas?"

"Do I not Know that you have played your part to perfection – I who, without being in the secret of the motives which have induced you to act thus, know the man as well as you."

"What secret? What motives? And of what man do you speak, companion?" cried Don Pablo impatiently.

"Pardieu! Of the man who has just left us."

"Don Sebastiao Vianna, the aide-de-camp of General de Castelmelhor."

"Well, it is capitally played," said Emile. "But now all dissimulation is useless. For the rest, if you persist in not uttering his name, that is your own affair. All this, in fact, does not much disturb me. You are free to give to Don Zeno Cabral the name of Dom Sebastiao."

"Eh!" cried the partisan, jumping up, "What name did you say?"

Don Pablo knit his eyebrows. A livid pallor covered his face.

"So this man," cried he, in a voice stifled by anger, "this man is Don Zeno Cabral?"

"Did you really not know that?" asked the young man.

"Yes, I was ignorant of it," cried the Pincheyra. "Do you swear it?"

"Pardieu! I have known him so long that I cannot be deceived."

The partisan darted a fierce look at him. He opened his mouth to speak, but changing his mind, he turned suddenly, and proceeded hastily towards his men, encamped around the tambo.

"To horse! To horse!" cried he to them.

"I believe," murmured the Frenchman, following him with a searching glance, "that the first one will free me from this one,

unless it should be that this man should deliver me from the first."

CHAPTER V

FREE – PERHAPS

After his Machiavellian soliloquy, the Frenchman, rubbing his hands, advanced cautiously towards the tambo, following with a gloomy countenance the preparations for departure being made by the Pincheyras.

Don Pablo was ready the first.

"Don Emile," said he to the young man, "I do not seek to fathom the motives which have induced you to conceal from me till this moment the name of a man whom – you have known for a long time as my enemy."

The Frenchman wished to interrupt him.

"Do not say anything to me," cried he with violence; "the service that you have rendered me is still too recent for me to demand an account of this ambiguous conduct; but remember this, I consider myself as now freed from all gratitude towards you."

"Be it so," answered the young man. "You know me well enough, I suppose, to be convinced that I do not fear; any more than I love you."

"I know that you are a brave man, señor, and that if the moment were to come for you to face me, you would bear yourself valiantly; but I did not wish to leave you without telling

you my intentions, and to warn you to place yourself on your guard."

"I thank you for that act of courtesy, señor; and I will take advantage of your warning."

"Now, adieu! Do not try again to cross my path."

Then striking the pommel of his saddle angrily with his fist, he placed himself at the head of his troop; and after having cried "Forward! Forward!" in a voice of thunder, darted off at a gallop.

"Aha!" said Emile, "All goes well; the vultures have rushed after the prey. It is a good game to win, to withdraw these two doves from the outstretched talons of these two birds of prey. God helping me, I will try."

And completely restored to good humour by this soliloquy, the painter entered the tambo.

The two ladies were half reclining on the skins before a fire lit by the Guarani. Scarcely recovered from the perils and the terrors they had undergone, they remained motionless and silent, their countenances pale, and their eyes half-closed absorbed in their own thoughts, not knowing whether they ought to be glad or sorry at being at last sheltered from danger, and at having escaped the fury of the tempest.

At the entry of the young painter, a faint smile appeared upon their faces.

"So," said the marchioness, after a stealthy glance at her daughter, "it is, thanks to your courage, and to your presence of mind, that we have escaped from a frightful death?"

"I have only been an instrument in the hand of God."

"This Indian has told me all," said the marchioness, designating Tyro by a gesture. "I know that now Don Pablo Pincheyra, bound by the gratitude which he owes you, would not dare to refuse you anything."

"Don Pablo was not alone, Madame."

"In fact, Don Sebastiao Vianna accompanies him, they say."

The painter smiled slyly.

"You laugh, Don Emile," she cried.

"Pardon me, Madame, this overflow of spirits. I will explain myself. Don Sebastiao Vianna was not the name of the man who came to the camp to demand your liberty."

"Ah!" murmured she; "Is he a man I know?"

"You know him, certainly; his name is Zeno Cabral."

"Don Zeno Cabral?" cried she, in a fright; "That man! Oh, then, I am lost!"

"Reassure yourself, Madame; you are in safety."

"What do you mean?"

"Don Pablo has departed, Madame. I have started him off in pursuit of Don Zeno, by revealing to him the name of the latter. Thus, apparently, we are completely delivered from all our enemies."

The marchioness tendered him her hand.

"I thank you," said she. "Your devotedness never fails."

"And never shall fail, Madame. We have not long to remain here. It is necessary for us to make a last effort, and to compete

in strategy with our enemies."

"Have you any plan?"

"Unhappily, no, Madame; but perhaps with the aid of our brave and faithful Tyro, we may concert a plan."

"Let us try, then," responded she, "and lose no time, which is so precious to us."

Tyro re-entered at this moment.

"Well," asked Emile of him. "Has anything fresh happened?"

"No, my friend; Sacatripas, whom I have charged to watch the departure of the Pincheyras, has seen them go at full speed towards the plain. There is no fear of a surprise on the part of Don Zeno; for a considerable distance from here there is only one practicable road, and that is the one on which we are."

"That is to be regretted, indeed; our flight is impossible."

"Mon Dieu!" murmured Doña Eva, clasping her hands with anguish.

"So we are lost," said the marchioness.

"I did not say so, Madame. I am compelled, however, to confess that the situation is extremely critical."

"Let us see, Tyro, my friend; you who know so well these mountains, in the midst of which you have been brought up – seek, invent! As for me, what do I know? Find an expedient which gives us a chance of safety," cried the painter.

"God is my witness, my friend, that my best desire is to see you out of danger," replied he.

"We have no hope but in you, my brave Indian," said Emile.

"Listen, then, since you insist on it; and first, I must tell you, that at a league from here, more or less, there is an almost impracticable path, which is, in fact, only the dry bed of a torrent. This path few persons know, and no one, I am convinced, would venture to follow it, so difficult is it. Scarcely traced on the side of the mountains, it winds through rocks and precipices, and must at the present time be inundated, by reason of the frightful storm which has raged in these parts. This path, however, has this advantage over the other; it very much shortens the passage from here to the plain."

"Up to the present time," interrupted the painter, "I do not see anything but what is very advantageous to us in what you say."

"Patience, my friend, I have not yet finished."

"Finish, then, in mercy's name," cried the Frenchman, with impatience.

"If it were only you and me, my friend," pursued the Guarani, "I should not hesitate."

"Why do you stop short?" asked the young man.

"I understand you," said the marchioness. "What two men can undertake, with a chance of success, would be madness for women to attempt."

The Indian bowed respectfully to the two ladies.

"That is just my idea, señora," said he. "But there are other objections."

"Of what objections do you speak?"

"This path, very little known by the whites, is nevertheless

much frequented by Puelche and Pampas Indians, fierce and untamed tribes, into whose hands we should be pretty nearly certain to fall. We should only escape one danger, to fall into another. At all events, it is necessary that these ladies should consent to resume the men's clothing."

"Do not trouble yourself about that," cried the marchioness.

"It would be necessary to march with the greatest prudence, watching, for fear of a surprise."

"And should a surprise happen," quickly interrupted the marchioness, "rather to allow ourselves to be killed, than to become the prey of these men."

"You admirably understand my thoughts, señora," answered the Guarani, respectfully bowing. "I have nothing more to add."

"This project is hazardous, and fraught with difficulties, I am convinced," said the painter; "but, for my part, I see nothing which renders its execution impossible. Let us set out at once, unless," added he, considering, "you think differently from me, Madame la Marquise, and that the dangers which, without doubt, await us on the road appear to you too great; in which case, Madame, I will conform to your wishes."

"As that is the case," nobly replied the marchioness, "a longer discussion becomes useless. Let us set out immediately. Go, then; in a few moments we shall be quite ready to follow you."

"Be it so, Madame," said the painter; "we will obey."

He made a sign to the Guarani to follow him, and both quitted the tambo.

A quarter of an hour, indeed, had not passed, when the ladies came out of the tambo, ready to start.

It was about half past three in the afternoon – an hour rather late to commence a journey, especially in the midst of the mountains, in these wild regions, where storms are so frequent, and changes of weather so rapid. But the fugitives, surrounded by enemies, from whom they had escaped as if by a miracle, had the gravest reasons to take themselves quickly from the spot.

The sky was of a dull blue; the sun, near the horizon, spread profusely its oblique rays on the earth, which it warmed; a light breeze tempered the heat, and agitated the leaves of the trees; black swans rose from the depths of the valleys, and flew rapidly in the direction of the plains, followed by great bald vultures. The evening was magnificent, and seemed to presage the continuance of fine weather.

Notwithstanding the rather perplexed state of mind in which the travellers were, the journey was commenced gaily. They talked, and even joked, forcing themselves to look hopefully to the future. As Tyro had stated, at about a league from the valley, hidden in the midst of a thick wood, they found the commencement of the path.

For any but those long habituated to life in the desert, the aspect of the path would have appeared very encouraging. In fact, the underwood almost wholly obstructed it; a high and tufted grass covered it as with a green carpet.

However, notwithstanding these encouraging signs of

complete solitude, the Guarani knew too well the astuteness of his race to be so easily deceived. The deserted appearance of the locality, instead of inspiring him with confidence, led him to redouble his precautions.

"Well, Tyro," the painter asked him, "you have nothing to complain of, I hope? Upon my word, this path is wild."

"Too wild, my friend," answered the Indian, shaking his head. "This disorder is too well managed to be real."

"Oh, oh! And what makes you suppose that, my friend? I see, absolutely, nothing to suspect."

"That is because you do not look above you, my friend. In the desert, and especially in the mountain, a track is marked in the trees, and not on the ground."

"But as to ourselves, It appears to me we simply follow the path."

"And we are wrong, my friend. On our entrance into the wood, we ought only to have advanced from branch to branch on the trees; our horses will betray us. Unhappily, what you and I could do, with some chance of success, the ladies who accompany us could not attempt."

"If what you say is very true, our efforts will only end in retarding our capture."

"Perhaps so, perhaps not, my friend; if God only gives us till tomorrow at noon, we shall probably be saved."

"How is that?"

"Look here; this path goes towards the desert of the Frentones.

The Frentones are, especially, enemies of the whites, to whatever country they belong; but they are good and hospitable to travellers. If we succeed in reaching their territory, we shall be comparatively in safety."

"Very good; and you expect to reach this territory tomorrow?"

"No; but we shall find ourselves nearly on the banks of the river Primero, and might set ourselves adrift on a raft."

"Pardieu!" joyously cried the young man, "That is a happy idea? It would be very unfortunate if, with so many chances of success, we do not escape."

"You know the people against whom we have to fight. Believe me, we are not saved yet."

"That is true; but, on the other hand, you see everything on the bright side."

"What a life would ours be if we could not brighten it up now and then!" pursued the young man.

CHAPTER VI

COMPLICATIONS

The same day, and nearly at the same hour, when Emile Gagnepain quitted the Valle del Tambo, a little troop, composed of seven or eight horsemen, followed a path a little distant from the encampment of the Guaycurus.

These travellers, well mounted and well armed, appeared to be Indians. A woman, or rather a young girl, accompanied them.

This young girl appeared to be of the age of fifteen years at the most. Graceful and sprightly, she allowed to float in disorder the silken ringlets, of her long blue-black hair upon her fair shoulders, slightly browned by the sun, which had given her complexion, a golden tint. Her fine skin, under which could be seen the course of the veins, preserved still the velvet down of youth; her features were beautiful, her eyes sparkling with humour; and her laughing mouth was formed with rare perfection.

She wore the costume of the women of the Guaycurus, that is to say, a long robe of striped cotton cloth fastened at the hips by the ayulate, that symbolical girdle that these women wear before marriage. A large mantle of the same stuff as the robe, which could, in case of need, cover her whole body, rested at this moment on the croup of her horse; little silver rings, strung

together, formed a kind of necklace which she wore on her neck; metal plates; bearing different figures covered her breast, and golden half-hoops were suspended from her ears.

Her delicate little feet, aristocratically arched, were, imprisoned in elegant buskins or half-boots, made with the fibres of the palm tree.

The cavalier, who travelled side by side with the young girl, bore a striking resemblance to her. His features were fine and intelligent, his forehead and his eyes black and well opened. – Although he wore the complete costume of the Guaycurus warrior, he was not tattooed, nor had paint in any way soiled the whiteness his skin.

Although his height was scarcely above the average, his limbs slight, and his manners rather effeminate, it was easy to perceive that this elegant exterior was united to an ardent soul and a brave heart.

The other warriors composing the little troop were hard-featured men, with bronzed complexions, and of ferocious aspect, forming a perfect contrast with the two persons whom we have tried to describe.

"Shall we arrive soon, brother?" asked the young girl, at the moment when we enter on the scene.

"Soon, I hope," distractedly replied the warrior. "The indications we have had appear to me to be favourable."

"Do you know, brother for what reason the Cougar has sent for us?"

"I do not know," answered the young man, with some hesitation; "the Cougar is a prudent chief, who does nothing without having maturely reflected on it."

"And we shall see Gueyma again?" asked she with animation.

"Is it not he, with the Cougar, who commands the warriors of our tribe?"

"You are right. I am foolish to ask you this question, brother. Oh, how happy I am!" she added.

"Dove's Eye," answered the warrior with severity, "do you not remember my advice?"

"Oh yes, brother," said she, blushing slightly, lowering her eyes; "but what harm is there in saying that, since you alone hear me?"

"Sister, a young girl ought to keep her feelings to her own heart."

"But you know how much I love Gueyma; you have yourself seemed to encourage our mutual liking."

"You mistake, sister; I feel always the same towards you; it is you, on the contrary, who – "

"Oh, do not blame me, brother," interrupted Dove's Eye, quickly; "do not mar by your remonstrances the joy that I feel. I promise you I will constrain myself."

The young man shook his head with an air of doubt.

"You do not believe me," pursued she; "you are wrong, Arnal; I will keep my promise."

"For your own sake, I fear the time when we shall again see

our friends."

"Do not disquiet yourself about that, brother. I will be as cold and as impenetrable as a rock."

"You must not go from one extreme to the other. Without manifesting too much joy, you must assume an expression of frank and cordial satisfaction, in again meeting with the friends and brethren of our tribe."

"Well, I understand you, brother; you will have no occasion to be dissatisfied with me."

At this moment a warrior approached.

"Has Arnal remarked that the track becomes more decided?" asked he.

"What thinks my brother, the Agonti?"

"I think that we are on the track of a numerous troop of horsemen."

"Are they whites or native warriors?"

"They are whites, and those who call themselves soldiers."

"Yes, this track is very distinct. These men, whoever they are, march boldly forward. They feel themselves sufficiently strong, no doubt, to have no need of concealing themselves, but fortunately for us these travellers are proceeding in a direction contrary to that which we follow. We have nothing, then, to fear from them."

"Look, moreover, at the path by which they have entered on their route."

"We can, then, continue to push on ahead; but we cannot be

too much on our guard."

"My brother, Arnal, may be tranquil."

"Good; my brother is a wise warrior. I have confidence in him," answered Arnal.

The Agonti bowed, and resumed his position in the advanced guard of the little troop.

Dove's Eye proceeded pensively by the side of her companion; the young girl seemed to have lost all her gaiety, and her charming carelessness. Her head falling on her breast, without noticing anything, with her little hand she gently whipped the horse, without knowing what she was doing – so absorbed was she by her thoughts. Arnal sometimes darted a side glance at her, and a smile of singular expression was perceptible on his lips; but for some reason or other, the young warrior did not manifest any desire to renew the conversation, and appeared satisfied with the obstinate silence of his companion.

Meanwhile the sun began to set, the black shadows of the trees lengthened more and more; night approached.

The Agonti appeared for some minutes a prey to anxious concern. Suddenly he stopped, alighted, stretched himself flat on the ground, and appeared for two or three minutes to listen eagerly.

The travellers had reined up their horses, and stopped.

A curtain of foliage enveloped them as completely as if it had been a thick wall; but it was transparent, and they could see through it, without being perceived, the path which they had so

abruptly quitted, and which was only about ten yards distant.

"What is the matter?" asked Arnal.

"A numerous troop of horsemen is advancing," said the Agonti; "we must be prudent."

"Very good; you have acted wisely. Listen; they approach."

"Yes, in a minute they will pass before us."

"We shall reconnoitre them at our ease, without fear of being discovered by them."

"Do you think so?" cried a harsh and guttural voice, from the midst, of the foliage.

"Ah!" cried Arnal, with a gesture of joy; "The Cougar."

"It is I," answered the chief; "you did not expect, I suppose, to meet, me so soon."

"Just so," answered Arnal, "but I am glad of the good fortune that, has brought you to us. Have you, then, abandoned your encampment?"

"Since sunrise my warriors have resumed their march. They are following me."

"Is Gueyma with them, brother?" asked the young girl.

"Dove's Eye forgets," severely answered the old chief, "that a woman has no right to interrogate a warrior."

"I am wrong, I confess," said she, dropping her head humbly; "but my father loves me; he will pardon me."

"I forgive you, my child; but a young girl has no right to speak but when she is spoken to."

This sharp reprimand was tempered with a look so gentle, and

a smile so sweet, that the young girl, blushing all the while, could not maintain any anger towards the old chief.

"You guessed, then, that we were here," asked Arnal.

"Did I not expect you?" laconically said the Cougar. "And now give your warriors orders to retire for the night."

The Cougar then made the young warrior follow him, and both again reached the path, while the Agonti arranged the camp, and had the wood cut, and the fires lighted.

As soon as he was in the path, he cast an inquiring look around him, to as to assure himself that he was quite alone with his companion; then he turned towards him, and appeared to wait till the latter should speak.

Arnal hesitated a minute. His eyebrows lowered as under the influence of some oppressive thought. The old chief smiled gently, as if to encourage him.

At last the warrior decided to speak; but, instead of the language of the Guaycurus, it was in Spanish that he spoke.

"How is he, since I saw him?" asked he. "Has he seen him?"

"Reassure yourself: he is well. All has passed in that interview better than you and I could have dared to hope," quickly resumed the chief.

"You swear it, Diogo?"

"On my honour, señor – " But immediately bethinking himself, he added: "Caballero, they have sworn friendship; they have exchanged arms."

"Oh, I thank heaven," cried Arnal. "But he?"

"He is always the same."

"What have you said to him?"

"Simply what it is necessary he should know – nothing more."

"Oh! I tremble, Diogo! I fear that he will not pardon me."

The old chief knitted his eyebrows.

"Not pardon you! No, no; hold up your head proudly; you have nothing of that kind to fear."

"I dare not hope," murmured Arnal.

"Silence!" answered the Cougar; "compose your countenance; reassume your self-command. Let us continue, for a few days, to act our parts, and especially let us carefully keep our secret."

"Oh, you are strong, Diogo," feebly said the young warrior; "but I, alas! –"

"You – you are Arnal, the bravest, and, despite his youth, the most renowned warrior of the Guaycurus; do not forget that."

The young man smiled through his tears.

"Oh! you are good and devoted, my friend," answered he.

The sound of the precipitate gallop of a numerous troop of horsemen was heard rapidly approaching, although, on account of the numerous windings of the path, it was impossible to perceive them.

"Rejoin your companions," hastily said the old chief, "and leave it to me to prepare your meeting."

"That will be the best," answered the young man.

And, after making a gesture of the hand to the Cougar, he re-entered the wood.

The old chief remained alone; his head fell upon his breast, and, for a few minutes, he appeared absorbed in thought; but he soon collected himself, casting around him a look of singular boldness and energy.

"It is not now that I ought to give way to weakness," murmured he, in a low and almost inarticulate voice. "The nearer the moment approaches, the more my will should become firm and immovable."

He soon found himself surrounded by Guaycurus warriors.

"Well," said the Gueyma; "why have you halted?"

"Because in this place we stay for the night."

"To camp already, when there are yet nearly two hours more daylight!" said the young chief.

"It if true," pursued the chief; "your observation is very just but it does not depend upon me."

"How is that?"

"Because the fires are lighted in the wood, and the encampments are prepared."

"The encampment prepared! By whom?"

"By friends – probably," answered the Cougar, with a strange smile.

"Ah!" exclaimed Gueyma, with an inquiring look.

"Yes, friends!" resumed the old chief, significantly "Did we not expect some? Dove's Eye, eh?"

"Let us be off, then!" cried the impetuous young man, putting his horse in train to dart forward.

But the Cougar suddenly stopped him, and, coldly laying his hand on the bridle:

"Do you remember the word that you have given me, Gueyma?" said he.

"But she is there."

"Yes, she is there; but what matters a few minutes?"

"A minute is an age for me."

"Is it thus that you answer me, Gueyma? Is it in this way that you keep your oath? Shall a woman's love make you forget your honourable engagements? Go, allow yourself to be overcome by a foolish passion; I do not count on you any longer."

The young man grew very pale at these severe words. For a moment he fixed an angry look on the bold old man, who looked at him with an expression of sorrow and disdain.

"Pardon me," he said, at last; "I was wrong. I thank you for having recalled me to myself. You shall not have to complain of me, Cougar."

"Come then," answered the old chief, joyfully pressing the hand which was held out to him; "now I am certain that you will not trespass over the bounds."

The two chiefs entered the wood, followed by their warriors, and they soon reached the camp, where Arnal waited for them.

CHAPTER VII

HOSPITALITY

Gueyma's and the Cougar's horses walked side by side, the riders modulating the pace, and stealthily looking around them.

Behind them pressed a crowd of Indians. Arnal and Dove's Eye, standing up near the principal watch fire, motionless, and hand in each other's band, directed their eyes towards the advancing troop. Dove's Eye was pale and trembling, but cool and calm in appearance.

Arnal smiled pleasingly at Gueyma, whose look, at times, was fixed upon him with unspeakable tenderness.

The Cougar alone seemed anxious.

When the two chiefs had come at about three or four paces from the bright burning fire, they alighted, and throwing the bridles on the necks of their horses, they bowed courteously to the young warrior, the latter immediately returning their salute.

"I am happy to see you, chief," said he, in a gentle voice. "Having set out several suns ago to meet you, I thank the Great Spirit, who has thus suddenly brought me to you."

Gueyma again bowed, affecting not to see Dove's Eye.

"I thank you, brother," answered he, addressing Arnal; "no camp could suit me better than yours."

"Will you take your place before this fire, brother?" resumed

Arnal; "The air is cold in these mountains; warm yourself, while Dove's Eye prepares the repast."

Gueyma sat silently before the fire, without appearing to have noticed that the name of Dove's Eye had been mentioned.

These forms of politeness, strictly demanded by Indian etiquette, having been satisfied, the ice between the chiefs was broken, and the conversation became friendly and intimate.

Separated for a long time, as they had been, they had many things to say.

Meanwhile Dove's Eye had not lost time; the repast was soon ready to be served.

Among the Indians, the women are exclusively charged with all the cares of the household, and all the hard and often repugnant labour which in other countries fall to the lot of men. The warriors consider them rather as slaves, made to obey their least caprice, than as companions.

Dove's Eye, after having served the warriors with the dishes she had prepared, and having offered them a cimarron maté, seated herself discreetly, a little in arrear of the group, near Arnal.

It was then only that Gueyma appeared to observe her presence. He fixed his eagle eye on the young girl, and, holding out his hand in a friendly way:

"Eaah!" said he, with a smile, "Dove's Eye has consented to leave the valleys of her tribe to follow Arnal?"

At these kind words, the young girl became red as a cherry,

and answered in a slightly trembling voice:

"Arnal is the brother of Dove's Eye; he has served her for father; wherever Arnal goes, Dove's Eye ought to follow him: it is her duty."

"Good, I thank Dove's Eye," said the chief.

"The place of a woman is where there are friends to love and serve."

"Dove's Eye remembers that she was, when an infant, received by the Guaycurus," said the Cougar.

"She remembers also," answered the young girl, with animation in her voice, "that she has been brought up by Arnal, the brother of Gueyma."

We must here make a short digression.

Tarou Niom, the principal captain of the Guaycurus, after a rather long absence, had one day arrived at the village of the warriors of his tribe, accompanied by Arnal and the Cougar. Arnal, although he was a man, and although he wore the costume and the arms of a warrior, carried, strange to say, an infant in his arms. This infant was his brother Gueyma, or, at least, this was what Tarou Niom said to those who made inquiries.

Things went on as usual for some years, when one day, on a return from an excursion which had been prolonged more than usual, the Cougar returned to the village, leading with him, or rather carrying in his arms, a charming little girl, two or three years old, whom he said he had found abandoned and dying from hunger, in a village which had been set on fire.

The little girl, so miraculously saved by the Cougar, had been adopted by Arnal, who had given her, on account of the mildness of her look, the characteristic name of Dove's Eye.

The two children had thus lived together, growing up in each other's company, so that their friendship had changed into love.

Arnal and the Cougar equally shared their tenderness between the two children.

But after a time, the friendship of the two children, which formerly he encouraged all in his power, seemed to irritate Arnal; his eyebrows knitted, he scolded Dove's Eye, and blamed her brother under the most frivolous pretexts; but, with an effort over himself, his countenance soon became serene, the smile returned to his lips, and he caressed the two children, pressed them in his arms with a feverish energy, and begged them always to love each other. Gueyma had become, thanks to his courage, one of the most famed warriors of the tribe; and, notwithstanding his youth, Tarou Niom, who loved him so much, had caused him to be chosen its chief.

The separation which ensued between Gueyma and Dove's Eye had been painful. It was then that, for the first time, the young people understood the power of the ties which bound them to each other; but they had to part.

The Cougar had great influence over the mind of the young chief, who professed for him a profound respect. Gueyma obeyed, despite his feelings, and left behind him his first love.

The joy of Gueyma was great in at last seeing Dove's

Eye again, whom he did not expect to see so soon; but the first moment of wild joy having passed, remembering the recommendations of the old chief, he repressed, though with great difficulty, his delight, and succeeded in wearing a complete mask of indifference on his noble and beautiful countenance.

The young girl, wounded by this coolness, felt her pride revolt. As she concealed from him the feelings which agitated her, and studied the counsels of Arnal more, perhaps, than he expected, she sustained the conversation commenced between her and Gueyma with that power of coquetry which, while it is the despair of men, renders women so powerful, and she soon so piqued the young man with her incessant shafts, that he was constrained to confess himself vanquished.

On a sign from Arnal, Dove's Eye went to an *enramada*, or cabin of boughs, constructed for her, where she remained free to give herself up to her thoughts. The two warriors remained alone by the fire.

After having assured themselves that no one was watching them, and that all the Indians, enveloped in their blankets, were sleeping round the fires, the Cougar and Arnal began to converse in a low voice in the Spanish language.

Their conversation was long; the stars began to pale when they at last sought repose, which they did not do, however, without having visited the sentinels to see if they were watching over the common safety.

At sunrise the camp was raised, and the Guaycurus resumed

their march.

Arnal, with joy, found that the direction followed by the young chief was that of the plains of Tucumán. Each step thus brought the Guaycurus nearer their hunting grounds.

The warriors appeared also to know that they were retracing their steps, and that they were at last leaving that Spanish territory, in which, during their struggle, they had so much suffered. Notwithstanding the impassibility which the Indians believe it a duty never to abandon, their features, unknown to themselves, had an expression of ill-concealed joy.

However, the Indians were too prudent to forget that they were in an enemy's country, and to neglect the precautions necessary to avoid a surprise.

Gueyma proceeded at the head of his warriors, in company with the Cougar, with whom he conversed, while Arnal and Dove's Eye remained in the rearguard.

On the evening or the second day, at the moment when Gueyma and the Cougar prepared to give the order to camp for the night, a horseman, galloping at full speed, turned an angle of the path followed by the Indians, and came towards them, waving above his head, as a sign of peace, a poncho that he held in his hand.

Soon another horseman appeared in the rear of his companion; then another, and another – amounting to six.

The unknown travellers appeared to be in a pacific humour, their carbines being slung over their shoulders.

With a gesture, Gueyma ordered his people to stop; then, after having exchanged a few words in a low voice with the Cougar, he gave his arms to the Agonti, who was standing aside, and advanced at a trot towards the horseman.

When the two men met, they examined each other, and discovered at a glance that both were Indians.

The two warriors bowed, each bending his head till it nearly touched the neck of the horse; then, after a short pause, Gueyma, seeing that the stranger wished that he should commence the conversation, said —

"My brother travels amidst the mountains in a bad season; the further he proceeds, the worse will the roads be."

"I do not wish to penetrate further into the mountains," answered the stranger; "I wish to get away."

"Then," said Gueyma, "my brother has lost his way."

"I know it," said the stranger, laconically.

"I do not understand my brother," said Gueyma.

"My companions and I have since the morning taken cognisance of the troop of my brother that we precede on the same path. On perceiving that my brothers made preparations for encamping, we held counsel, and I have been charged to retrace my steps, in order to consult with the chief of the cavaliers by whom we have been followed."

"*Epoi!*" (good!), resumed Gueyma, smiling; "The eye of my brother is straightforward, his tongue is not double, his heart must be loyal. I am the chief of the Guaycurus warriors, who

are behind me. Let my brother explain: the ears of Gueyma are open. My brother may speak freely and without restraint."

As the two Indians perceived they were of different tribes, they had begun the conversation in Spanish – a mixed language that both could understand.

"Those who follow me," said the stranger, "are not sons of our territory, they are palefaces whose hunting grounds are very far from here, in the country where the sun hides himself, down there, behind the great Salt Lake.

"I am their guide in these regions which they explore and which they do not know. They come openly to ask aid and protection of my brother, claiming the rights of Indian hospitality, till they consider all danger past."

"Whoever may be the men who accompany my brother, to whatever tribe they may belong – even if they should be the most implacable enemies of my tribe – they have a right to my protection and my kindness. The rights of hospitality are sacred. Let my brother tell his companions that I do not wish to know anything about them; they are travellers – that is all – follow on. Here is my *haak*," said he, drawing a knife from his girdle, and handing it to the stranger; "if I betray my promise, my brother will bury it in my heart before all my assembled people. My brother and his companions will sleep this evening with the Guaycurus warriors."

The two warriors bowed, and then, reining back their horses, each returned at a gallop towards his people.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GUIDE

Meanwhile, as we have seen in a preceding chapter, after the council held in the Valle del Tambo, Tyro had charged himself with the guidance of the little caravan, composed of two ladies, the French painter, the two gauchos, and himself.

As Tyro had foreseen, the travellers did not meet on this route any other obstacles than the material difficulties of the road – obstacles that by courage and perseverance they succeeded in overcoming.

The Guarani, as a warrior, thoroughly habituated to traverse an enemy's country, watched with extreme solicitude over the safety of those who had so frankly trusted to him, roaming continually round the caravan – in advance, in the rear, and on either side.

Every evening he camped in a position studied with care – a position which placed them, during their sleep, out of the range of a surprise.

The high peaks of the Cordilleras began by degrees to lower before the travellers. They had left the cold regions, and now found themselves in a temperate climate; the air became milder, the sun warmer, the atmosphere less sharp to breathe; the trees assumed less harsh tints, their branches were more leafy, and the

birds appeared more numerous, and in brighter colours.

And the two ladies felt hope by degrees returning to their hearts, broken by suffering; and dimly saw, through a not distant future, the end of their misfortunes.

Some days had passed since their departure from the Valle del Tambo, when they found themselves almost in a civilised country, and although they had to redouble their prudence to escape the numerous bands of patriots which traversed the country in every direction, nevertheless, the prospect of soon getting away from these desolate mountains, in the midst of which they had so long wandered, rendered them joyous, and made them not only forget all they had suffered, but induced them to look at everything in a favourable light. For once, they were pursuing their journey gaily.

Tyro alone, who had taken on himself the responsibility of the general safety, did not give himself up to any foolish hope.

He knew, subtle Indian that he was, that the Montoneros, and other rovers on the highway or great plains, had the habit of hiding in the gorges of the mountains, to watch for the passing of travellers or caravans, and to dart on their prey, and carry it away, at the very moment when all danger seemed to have passed.

Tyro, deeply pondering on this circumstance – quite the reverse of his companions, whose features brightened more and more – became more and more gloomy, for he felt that each step that he made brought him nearer to a danger so much the more terrible, that it was, unless by a miracle from the Almighty, nearly

inevitable.

On the day of which we speak, when, the camp was raised, and everyone ready to start, the Indian took the painter aside, and gave him all the information necessary to follow the path which opened into the defile, and turned round these abrupt flanks.

"Why so many details?" asked Emile; "Since you are with us, you will know how to guide us, I suppose."

"No, my friend, I shall not be with you," answered Tyro; "that is why I give you this information."

"What! You will not be with us!" cried the young man in surprise; "Where are you going then?"

"I shall be in the advance guard, my friend, in order to reconnoitre the country we must pass through."

"You are mad, my good Tyro; you know very well, and you have frequently told me so, that we have now nothing to fear. We are far from the Valle del Tambo, and the haunts of the Pincheyras. What is the use, then, of this superfluity of precaution?"

"My friend, although I, like yourself," coldly answered the Guarani, "am convinced that we are not threatened with any of the catastrophes which so long have been suspended over us, nevertheless, it would be terrible for us to fail at the very moment when we think we are safe; and as, in this matter, it is my honour which is at stake, let me, I beg, act in my own way."

"Be it so," said the young man; "do as you like, run, look, watch; I give you full liberty of action. We have with us two ladies

whom I have sworn to save, and I have no right to be imprudent. Go, but do not be too long."

"As short a time as possible," answered he, bowing.

And putting his horse into a gallop, he darted forward, leaving the travellers to continue their journey.

"What has Tyro been doing to you, and why does he leave us thus?" asked the marchioness.

"He has been telling me, Madame," he answered, bowing to her, "the route we ought to take, and he has set off in advance as our trusty pioneer."

"Always devoted," replied the marchioness, smiling, "always faithful."

"Like his master," added, in a low voice, Doña Eva.

Several hours passed, and about eleven in the morning the travellers stopped under the shade of a clump of trees, so as to let the hottest part of the day pass.

Tyro had not reappeared; never since the commencement of the expedition had he made so long an absence. The painter felt uneasy, and several times had risen, and, with an anxious look, had examined the desolate route which stretched before him, till it was lost to sight. At last, about three in the afternoon, the young man gave the signal for starting.

They resumed their journey; only this time, instead of keeping near the ladies, Emile spurred his horse and dashed ahead.

The clump of trees under which the travellers had found a protecting shade had long disappeared in the distant bluish

horizon, and the sun had begun sensibly to decline, when the painter perceived a horseman galloping towards him.

In this horseman the young man immediately recognised his guide.

Giving way, immediately, to the impatience which had so long tormented him, the painter put his horse into a gallop and soon rejoined him.

"Well," he asked, "what news?"

"Many things, my friend," resumed the Indian.

"I understand, pardieu!" cried he; "Only I wish to know whether these things are good or bad."

"That depends on how you judge them, my friend; for my part, I think them good."

"Let us have them, then."

"With all my heart; but perhaps it would be better, instead of remaining stationary in the middle of the route, if we continued our journey. I should like that at first you alone should hear what I have to tell you."

"You are right, my friend; let us push on then, and as we proceed you shall tell me what you have done," said the young man. "Now, speak," added he.

Tyro, by habit rather than from prudence, looked carefully round him.

"What I have to report is not much," he said, "but I think it very important for you."

"Go on!" answered the young man with impatience.

"Briefly, it is this. We are approaching the plains. The more we advance in this direction, the greater is the risk of finding enemies before us. We must, therefore, be continually on our guard against the traps that may be set for us. I do not know Why, but this morning, I felt myself seized with secret anxiety, without apparent cause."

"It is the same with me," interrupted the young man, who became suddenly sad; "I do not know what is passing within me, but I have the presentiment of a misfortune, or at least of an important event. Is it for good? Is it for evil? That is what I cannot say."

"I incline to the former opinion, my friend, and for this reason: this morning, after having for some minutes talked with you, I left you to go in search of news, as you know."

The painter nodded, and the Guarani continued:

"I followed the path for a long time without seeing anything suspicious; I was even preparing to retrace my steps to rejoin and reassure you; but I did not like to do so without taking a last precaution. I alighted, and with my ear to the ground, I listened. I then heard a distant sound, indistinct, but resembling that produced by a numerous troop of horsemen. I remounted and started ahead. A quarter of an hour afterwards all my doubts were removed; I was right; at about two gun shots before me I saw, coming at a moderate pace, the advance guard of this troop."

"The advance guard!" cried Emile; "They are soldiers then."

"Partisans; but listen attentively, my friend; for now the question becomes more interesting."

"Speak! Speak!"

"You have heard, have you not," he resumed, "that the Portuguese have taken as auxiliaries several Indian tribes."

"Just so; but what has this to do with the matter?"

"Wait, wait, my friend. The troop that I have met is composed of warriors of these tribes – the most warlike of all, perhaps, the Guaycurus."

"What do you infer from this?"

"A very simple thing; according to the route that they travel, these warriors are proceeding towards Brazil."

"Brazil!" cried the young man.

"Yes, Brazil, the country that we wish to reach."

"What can we do in the matter, my poor friend?"

"It only depends on yourself, my friend; here is what is to be done!"

"Let us have it then," answered the young man.

The Indian did not remark, or feigned not to remark, the tone in which this was said, and continued coldly:

"These Guaycurus warriors form a troop of at least two hundred men, enemies of the Spaniards. Either they will try to glide unperceived in the midst of the Montoneros who skirt the plains, or, if they cannot escape thus, they will open a passage at the point of their lances."

"Well!" said the young man, becoming attentive.

"Well, my friend, in joining them we shall follow their fortunes."

"But you forget one thing, my poor friend, and a very important thing."

"What is it, mi amo?"

"This; we cannot thus join ourselves to this troop; if we are sufficiently foolish to discover ourselves to it we shall be immediately taken prisoners."

"Is it that only which embarrasses you, my friend?"

"My faith, yes," laughingly replied the young man.

"Then, my friend, be easy; I charge myself with causing you to be received by this troop in a manner not only flattering, but also advantageous to you. I know Indian customs."

"Very good, my friend; continue."

"I will claim the rights of Indian hospitality. You need have no dread of treachery; they would die themselves to defend you."

"Hum! Do you know, that this is very tempting that you thus propose to me, my friend?"

"Accept it, then!"

"I do not demand anything better; but I ought to consult the ladies."

"Well, my friend, consult them, then; but quickly, if possible, for time presses."

"It shall not be long," responded the young man, and, turning bridle with that promptness which formed the basis of his character, he rejoined at a gallop the ladies, who were not a great

distance in arrears.

They listened with serious attention to the communication of the young man; the project of Tyro appeared to them simple, and sure of success. Consequently, they agreed to it promptly.

The Guarani prepared himself speedily to put it into execution.

We have reported in full his interview with Gueyma, at the conclusion of which he returned to his companions, who awaited his return with impatience, not unmixed with anxiety; but all inquietude ceased when they learned the noble and frank response of the chief.

Emile, followed by the two ladies, then advanced towards the Guaycurus, who had halted to receive their visitors, and warmly thanked Gueyma for the protection which he had consented to accord to him and his companions.

The Indian chief replied with majestic dignity, that, in acting as he had done, he fulfilled a duty prescribed by honour; that thanks were superfluous; and that while the strangers remained with the warriors they would be considered as cherished brothers, and as children of the nation.

The Cougar remained a passive spectator of this scene, with which he had not interfered in any way; when the strangers had retired, he leaned towards the ear of Gueyma:

"Have you well considered these gentlemen?" he demanded.

"Yes," responded the chief; "why do you ask me the question?"

"Because two of them are women."

"Well, what of that?"

"More than you suppose," he said, and strode away, ending brusquely the interview, to escape the questions to which he did not care to: reply.

CHAPTER IX

THE CAMP

Zeno Cabral, after his interview with the young painter, departed at gallop from the Valle del Tambo, followed naturally by the Spanish officers, who had no plausible motives for remaining with Don Pablo Pincheyra.

The Montonero galloped thus during about four hours, incessantly exciting his horse, the speed of which seemed almost a miracle, until arrived at a crossroad, where the route branched into two paths. Here he stopped, and leaning towards his two companions, who had followed him at almost as great a pace:

"Caballeros," said he, ceremoniously saluting them, "I beg you to accept all my thanks for the loyal manner in which you have kept the word you have given me; but here is your road," said he, pointing to the path on the left, "and this is mine," added he, indicating that to the right. "Let us separate now; I wish you a good journey."

"I thank you, monsieur," responded the count courteously; "only, Will you permit me to ask you a question?"

"Speak."

"It is not a question that I would ask you; it is a prayer that I desire to make."

"Prayer or question, speak, monsieur; I will answer you."

"Sir, my companion and I are Spaniards, from Europe – that is to say, strangers to this country. If you leave us here, we shall inevitably be lost, ignorant as we are of the route that we ought to follow."

"When do you wish to go?"

"Mon Dieu, señor! That is just what troubles us," said the captain, joining in the conversation.

"Just so; then you desire – "

"Mon Dieu! We desire to reach its advanced posts, and that as soon as possible."

The Montonero reflected for some time.

"Gentlemen," he at last answered, "what you wish is very difficult; it is evident that you will have great trouble in passing through our troops. I only see one way of getting you out of the difficulty, but I fear that you would not accept it."

"What way is this?" cried the two Spaniards.

"This is it – to follow me where I go; only I exact your word of honour, as soldiers and gentlemen, that you will be dumb as to what you may see and hear. On this condition I engage to enable you to reach, with very little delay, the advanced posts of your army. Do you accept?"

"Yes, we accept heartily, caballero," cried the two officers.

"Enough, gentlemen," said Zeno Cabral; "we make a new contract which, I am convinced, will be as loyally kept as the first. Come, then, gentlemen; we have already been here a long time."

"Proceed, sir," answered the count; "we follow."

They set out.

They proceeded thus till the evening, without exchanging a single word. Why should they speak? They had nothing to say.

At the moment when the sun disappeared behind the snowy peaks of the Cordilleras, on a sign from the partisan, the horsemen stopped.

Night was coming on, but the darkness was yet only so deep that the landscape, half veiled by the shadows of evening, appeared all the grander.

The path had by degrees become broader; it now formed a route bordered right and left by high forests of cork trees, through which it passed under magnificent arches of foliage; a thick, coarse grass reached nearly to the chests of the horses; and a waterfall, bounding in disordered masses from the top of a chaos of rocks, formed to the right of the travellers a large silvery sheet, in which the pale moon was reflected.

"We have arrived, gentlemen," said Zeno Cabral; "you can quit your saddles."

"Arrived!" said the count, looking round him.

"For the evening, at all events, count," answered the partisan; "for the few paces we have to go we can take on foot."

Speaking thus the Montonero had attached the bridle of his horse to the pommel of his saddle, and removed the stirrups.

"But our horses?" asked the captain.

"Do not disturb yourself about them."

"But they cannot remain thus."

"They will not remain here; be easy, care will be taken of them."

The count and the captain alighted.

"Well," resumed Zeno, "now wait a bit."

He then took a whistle which was hanging at his neck by a gold chain, concealed under his clothes, and gave a long and shrill whistle.

In a moment a man appeared.

"Ah! Ah! It is you, Don Sylvio," said the partisan, in a good-humoured tone.

"Yes, general, it is me," said the old soldier.

"Very good; let your men take care of the horses, and let us be conducted to the camp."

The officer turned towards the shrubbery from which he had so unexpectedly emerged.

"Hola!" cried he in a loud voice, "Come here, you fellows!"

The six soldiers, who were doubtless in ambuscade not far off, darted suddenly from the underwood, and, having respectfully bowed to Zeno Cabral, ranged themselves behind the old officer, ready to obey blindly the orders which they might receive.

"Is the camp far?" asked the Montonero, addressing Don Sylvio.

"At a gunshot at the most, general."

"You will guide us; as to you," he added, turning to the soldiers, "you know where you have to put the horses."

The soldiers bowed without answering, and quickly

approached the horses.

Don Zeno looked round him as if he wished to fathom the darkness, and assure himself that no enemy was watching him; then, motioning Don Sylvio to go on before him:

"Come, gentlemen," he said; "let us go on."

The three then entered the wood, following the captain. Notwithstanding the increasing darkness, the latter found his way with a certainty which showed either that, like certain animals, he had the faculty of seeing in the dark, or that he had a thorough knowledge of the locality through which he was passing.

A quarter of an hour thus passed, during which the four men marched in Indian file – that is to say, following each other one by one – without exchanging a word. At the end of this time they began to perceive the reddish tints of several fires shining through the trees, which now became thicker.

"Halt! Who goes there?" suddenly cried a man.

"Zeno and liberty!" answered the captain, coldly.

"Pass!" said the sentinel, lowering his gun.

The travellers continued their journey. At about ten paces further on, a second sentinel stopped them, and then a third barred their passage at the moment when they reached the skirt of a large glade, in the midst of which was established a camp, which, by the number of fires lighted, appeared to be considerable. This sentinel, when he had exchanged the password with the captain, did not raise his gun as the others had done; he contented himself with turning half round.

"Officer of the guard!" he said; "Reconnoitre!"

There was a movement in the glade, the clatter of arms was heard, followed immediately by the hasty step of several men, and ten soldiers, commanded by an officer, came towards the sentinel.

"¡Vive Dios!" said in a low voice the captain Don Lucio Ortega, to the partisan, "Receive my felicitations, señor; you maintain a rare discipline in your camp."

"What would you have, captain?" asked Don Zeno, smiling; "It ought to be so. Would it not be very stupid for us some day, for a want of a little vigilance, to be surprised by the enemy?"

The officer who had been called by the sentinel arrived at this moment, followed by several soldiers, apparently ready to aid him, if necessary.

But this time it was Zeno Cabral who took on himself to reply. On perceiving the officer, he motioned away Don Sylvio, and taking his place:

"Each one in his turn," said he in a low voice, placing his hand in a friendly way on the old officer's shoulder.

"That is right," answered the latter, bowing respectfully, and moving off.

"Who goes there?" cried the chief of the patrol, who had come to the call of the sentinel.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Montonero, apostrophising the officer, "Are you there, then, Captain Don Estevan Albino?"

"Cuerpo de Cristo!" cried the officer; "It is the general's

voice."

"There! I knew you would recognise me."

"Ah! This is a fortunate arrival!" said the captain.

"You know," said Don Zeno, "that I expect that you will permit me to pass."

"¡Vive Dios! General, are you not chief among us? We will escort you."

"Come, gentlemen," said he, addressing the two Spaniards, "I believe we shall be well received."

"I should like to see it otherwise," grumbled Don Sylvio, through his moustache.

The news of the arrival of the general had now been spread through the camp; those who had been watching had risen; the sleepers, rudely awakened, had imitated them, rubbing their eyes; and all hastened, with torches and cries of joy, into the presence of the chief whom they adored.

Zeno Cabral then entered his camp, amidst the bright reflection of the torches, agitated by the night breeze.

As soon as the chief found himself in the midst of his staff, who hastened round him to congratulate him, he, by a gesture, ordered silence.

"Gentlemen," said he, pointing to the two men who accompanied him, and who stood modestly behind him, "these two caballeros are my friends, and not my prisoners. Although devoted to another cause than our own, and not sharing our political convictions, they are, for a time at least, placed under

the security of our honour. I commend them to your honourable care; see that they want for nothing, and are treated with the respect due to them."

"Thank you, general," said the two men; "we did not expect less from your courtesy."

The introduction over, the soldiers occupied themselves with the newcomers.

Probably the arrival of the general, as the Montoneros called him, was expected, for a vast tent in the middle of the camp had been raised for him; but, notwithstanding the weariness and hunger that he felt, he did not consent to retire then, till he had seen the Spaniards installed as comfortably as circumstances would permit.

By degrees, quiet was re-established in the camp; the Montoneros resumed their places round their bivouac fires, and were soon asleep under their mantles.

The sentinels alone kept watch.

We are wrong; there was another that kept watch – Zeno Cabral.

Leaning on a table, his head between his hands, he was examining attentively, by the uncertain light of a smoky lamp, a map unrolled before him.

The map was one of the viceroyalty of Buenos Aires.

Now and then, on certain places on the map which he was so carefully studying, the Montonero stuck pins, the heads of which had been dipped in black or red wax.

Don Zeno had, for about an hour, given himself up to this work, which so much absorbed him that he had forgotten fatigue and sleep, when the curtain of the tent was drawn aside, and a man appeared.. At the sound of his steps the general raised his head.

"Ah! It is you, Don Juan Armero?" said he, saluting the person in a friendly way; "What news? You return from a reconnoitering trip, do you not?"

"Just so, general," answered Don Juan, after having given a military salute to his chief; "I have just arrived, and I bring news."

"Speak without fear. Everyone is asleep."

"That may be, but if you will allow me, I will tell you the news in the open air – not here."

"How is that?" said Don Zeno; "We are, I think, in a very good position to talk here."

"Excuse me, general," said Don Juan Armero, "but these walls of canvas, which intercept the view, without preventing words from being heard, cause me a fear which I cannot surmount. I am afraid, though I may be deceived, that there may be a spy on the watch."

"Is what you have to say to me important, then?" asked Don Zeno.

"I think it is of some importance."

"Hum!" said Zeno, in a reverie; "Come then."

The night was calm; millions of stars glittered in the dark blue sky; the breeze gently agitated the leafy tops of the trees; the

moon, on the wane, spread an uncertain light on the landscape.

The two men proceeded a few steps silently side by side. Zeno Cabral was reflecting, and Don Juan Armero respectfully waited till his chief should address him.

"Well," the partisan asked, "what is this news, Don Juan? You can without fear tell me here."

"Just so, general," he answered. "I have been, as you know, on a journey of discovery. The Brazilian army has left its cantonments in the Banda Oriental; a division of this army is advancing by forced marches in this direction to take possession of the fords of the rivers, and the mouths of the defiles, so as to permit a second division, which follows it at a day's march behind, to invade Tucumán."

"Oh! Oh!" murmured the partisan, "That is, indeed, serious. Is this news reliable?"

"Yes, general."

"Well, go on; but just a word – have you learned by what general this Brazilian division is commanded?"

"Yes, general."

"And his name is?" he asked.

"It is the Marquis Don Roque de Castelmelhor."

Something like a smile crossed the austere face of the Montonero, and gave him an inexpressible look of hope and hatred.

"What direction do these troops follow?" he said.

"They are preparing to cross the desert plains of the

Abipones."

"Good!" he murmured; "However quick they will march, we will rejoin them; and," slightly raising his voice, "what news of the Guaycurus?"

"None, general."

"That is strange; have you nothing else to communicate to me?"

"Pardon, general; I have indeed some more important news for you."

"Come, speak! I am listening."

"Don Pablo Pincheyra, the Bear of Casa-Frama, has suddenly abandoned his inaccessible repair."

"I know it," said the general.

"But what you doubtless do not know is, that, furious at having been so completely deceived by you, he is pursuing you – with only a few men, it is true."

"Good!" said Zeno Cabral, smiling; "Let them come, Don Juan, let them come. Anything else?"

"Nothing, general, unless it is to ask you if your expedition has succeeded, and if you are satisfied."

"Enchanted, Don Juan, enchanted! I hope that, in a few days, we shall have attained the end that I have for so long contemplated."

"God grant it, general."

"Thank you, Don Juan," said he. "I hope God will not destroy my hopes. Good night."

The officer bowed and immediately retired, and Zeno Cabral regained his tent with slow steps.

"Ah!" murmured he, falling on a seat; "Would that fortune may at last favour me, and that I may be allowed to capture them all by a throw of the net!"

He remained a short time pensive; then, having trimmed his lamp, he again bent over his map.

The most profound silence reigned without; except the sentinels, everyone in the camp was asleep.

Till the morning, the general's lamp burned in his tent.

He alone, of the partisans, kept unquiet vigil.

CHAPTER X

THE FORAGERS

About ten days had passed between the events that we have just related and the day on which we resume our narrative. The scene is no longer in the Cordilleras, but in the midst of the vast deserts which separate Brazil from the Spanish possessions – a kind of neutral territory, which the two nations had for a long time desperately disputed, and which was held by warlike and independent Indians.

The spot to which we have transported our scene was an immense plain enclosed by high mountains, whose peaks were covered in snow. A large river divided the plain into two nearly equal parts, though with a thousand capricious windings; its silvery waters, slightly rippled by the morning breeze and glittering in the first rays of the sun, reflected changing colours as if thousands of diamonds had been scattered on its bosom.

The calm of this majestic desert was only disturbed at this moment by a numerous troop of horsemen, who skirted at a gallop the left bank of the river.

These horsemen, whose nationality it was impossible to discover so far off, appeared to be warriors.

Whoever they might be, they appeared to be in great haste, and dashed forward with such rapidity that, if they continued

thus for a few hours, some of them would be inclined to fall back and lag behind.

The more this troop advanced into the plain the easier it was, through the cloud of dust that enveloped them, which was at times driven away by the wind, to discover the circumstances under which they were travelling. The troop was composed of more than four thousand men. Each horseman of the principal corps had a foot soldier riding on the same horse behind him.

This circumstance was not at all extraordinary.

Arrived at a point of land jutting into the river, the advanced guard stopped.

Two hours later the tents were ready, intrenchments made, sentinels posted, and the corps d'armée was firmly established in an excellent position out of the reach of a surprise.

It was ten o'clock in the morning.

Except the corps d'armée, the immense plain appeared quite deserted.

Nevertheless, several measures of precaution had been taken. Sentinels, placed at certain distances, watched over the common safety, and their horses, which are generally left to browse at liberty during a halt, were attached to pickets fixed in the earth. The bivouac fires were lighted in hollows and fed by an extremely dry wood, which only emitted light and scarcely perceptible smoke.

A remarkable circumstance was that several whites, or rather several persons clothed in the costume of the Spanish-Americans

of the Banda Oriental, were among the Indians, and were treated as guests and friends.

Then, on the other side of the river, at the opposite angle of the triangle, of which the corps formed, so to say, the summit, was a third troop of horsemen, also very numerous; but the latter had simply halted among the high grass.

These horsemen were Montoneros, that is to say, partisans.

As to the former, they had not neglected any precaution to escape observation. Concealed behind a thick curtain of shrubbery, they were ambuscaded like hunters on the watch.

The horses, saddled and ready to be mounted, had their nostrils covered with girdles, to prevent them from neighing. Near each horse a lance was struck in the ground, the point downwards.

This last troop evidently knew the precarious situation in which they were, and the disagreeable neighbours that chance or fatality had given them.

Meanwhile the Montoneros, far from showing the least inquietude or the slightest fear of the enemies camped so near them, appeared gay and very unconcerned.

But in all other respects the plain preserved its calmness; no suspicious undulation agitated the grass; the woods preserved their mysterious silence.

Hours passed; it was about two o'clock in the afternoon. A heavy heat oppressed the earth; a heated atmosphere which no breeze refreshed bent towards the ground the half-burnt grass.

At this moment some thirty horsemen, amongst whom glittered the golden embroidery of the uniforms of several officers, left the camp of which we have previously spoken, and proceeding in a slanting direction, gained the river.

These horsemen wore the Brazilian uniform. Whether they were persuaded that the plain was really solitary, whether they reckoned on the proximity of their camp to be defended against any dangers which might threaten them, or whether there was any other motive, they marched with very little order, the officers, amongst whom was a general, keeping in advance, and the horsemen forming the escort going on haphazard.

Nearly at the same time, when these foragers or scouts left their camp to make, at so unusual an hour, a trip into the plain, at some distance before them, on the bank of the river, a troop of horsemen, equal in number – that is to say, composed of about thirty men, in the picturesque costume of the Buenos Aireans, appeared marching to meet them.

This second troop marched as rapidly as their horses, harassed by a long journey, could proceed.

The two troops soon found themselves in sight.

"Eh! Eh!" said the Brazilian general, addressing a captain who was riding by his side, "I think those are our people; what do you think of it?"

"I think so too, general," answered the officer; "come, that will set me right with them."

"Yes, they are men of their word; I think it augurs well for the

result of our conference. Remember that we are very far from Tucumán, and that they must have made great haste to arrive here on the day."

"Just so, general; we are, if I am not deceived, on the territory of the Indian bravos, on neutral ground."

"Yes, you are right," answered the other, suddenly becoming pensive. "I think I have even a confused remembrance of these parts."

"You, general!"

"Yes, yes, but a long time ago; I was young then; I did not think of taking service. Impelled by I know not what furious ardour, I traversed these desert regions in search of adventures – for my pleasure," he added.

The captain looked at him for a moment with an expression of gentle pity.

Some minutes thus passed. At last the general raised his head, and again addressing his aide-de-camp – that was the position that the captain occupied towards him:

"These gauchos are rude men, are they not, Don Sebastiao?" he asked.

"It is said, general," answered the officer, "that these men are remarkable for power, skill, and courage. I cannot vouch for it, only having heard so much."

"I know them; I have seen them at work; they are demons."

"It is possible," said the captain smiling; "but I think that, without going very far, it would be easy to find in Brazil men

who for bravery, power, and cunning are equal to them, if they are not superior."

"Oh! Oh! You are of course joking, Don Sebastiao?"

"I am not at all joking; I express my conviction."

"A conviction! And of whom do you speak then?"

"Why, the Paulistas, general – the Paulistas whom you know as well as I do – those extraordinary men who have accomplished so many extraordinary things since the discovery of America, and to whom Brazil owes her incalculable riches."

The aide-de-camp would have continued speaking in the same manner, but the general did not listen to him; his countenance had become of a livid paleness; a convulsive trembling had, like an electric shock, run through his body, and he had sunk upon his horse as if he were on the point of losing consciousness.

"Good Heaven! What is the matter with you, general?" cried the officer.

"I do not know," answered the latter, in a choking voice: "I do not feel well."

"The heat, no doubt, general?"

"Yes, that is it, I think; but never mind, I am better – much better; it will be nothing, I hope."

"God grant it, general! You really frightened me."

"Thank you, Don Sebastiao, I know your kindness. For some time I have been subject to sudden faintness, that I do not know how to account for; but as you have seen, the fit is always very short."

The captain bowed without answering, and the conversation ceased.

Meanwhile the horsemen whom Don Sebastiao had perceived, advanced rapidly, and they were soon within fifty paces of the Portuguese.

Then they made a halt, and for a short time they appeared to consult together. Then a horseman separated from the group and set off direct towards the Brazilians.

The general had attentively followed with his eye the movements of the newcomers. On a sign from him Don Sebastiao left his troop, which remained motionless, and spurring his horse, boldly approached the gaucho, after having attached a white handkerchief to the point of his sword.

The two envoys, who were recognised as such, met at an equal distance from the two troops still remaining in the rear, but ready for attack as for defence.

After having attentively examined the man in face of whom he was, Don Sebastiao at last resolved, seeing that the other remained silent, to speak first.

"Caballero," said he in Spanish, slightly bowing his head, "I am Don Sebastiao de Vianna, captain in the Brazilian service, sent to you by my general, who has himself come to meet you to know if you and your companions are enemies or friends."

"The question that you do me the honour to address to me, señor captain," answered the gaucho, "is extremely delicate; I cannot myself answer it, and will leave to others more competent

than myself to determine it."

"That is very well put, caballero; however, I have the honour to tell you that, holding this plain with superior forces, we have a right, for our own safety, to exercise a strict watch over the territory which surrounds us. I am pleased to hope that among the persons who accompany you, there is at all events one who is in a position to give me an answer."

"I hope so too, caballero," answered the gaucho, smiling; "nothing is more easy than to assure yourself of that. The heat is suffocating. At a few paces from here there is a woody copse. Let us stop there for an hour, swearing on our honour to separate without striking a blow, if our mutual explanations are not satisfactory."

"¡Vive Dios, caballero! Your proposition appears to me very honourable, and I shall heartily accept it."

The two horsemen then ceremoniously bowed, turned their bridles, and rejoined at a gallop those who had sent them forward.

A few minutes afterwards, the two troops met and mingled with each other; the horsemen alighted, and stretched themselves carelessly on the grass under the shade of the giant trees which skirted the wood; the Brazilian officers and three or four of the gauchos who appeared to be the chiefs of the troop, after politely bowing, without exchanging a word, penetrated the covert, where they soon disappeared from the observation of their people, who had not even turned their heads to see what they were doing.

If these officers had not been so absorbed by their thoughts

on entering the woods, they would not have ventured into the covert without having carefully examined the underwood and the thicket which surrounded them. But, thanks to the profound secrecy with which they had kept their intentions – and, more than all, confident in the numerous forces that accompanied them, they were convinced that they ran no danger.

Alter a walk of about a quarter of an hour, the officers reached a rather extensive glade surrounded by thickets almost impenetrable.

The dead cinders of a fire, and some remains of burnt wood, showed that some days or perhaps hours before other travellers had been here to seek a temporary shelter.

"We are not the first who have discovered this glade," said the general, stopping and courteously bowing to the persons who accompanied him; "but never mind, señor, I think the place is well chosen for our conversation that we wish to have, and I think we shall do well to stop here."

"I am thoroughly of your opinion, señor general; let us stay here, it would be difficult to have a better place."

The six officers then formed a group in the middle of the glade, and then commenced the presentations, for those men, who knew each other well by name, and who had come so far to treat on important matters, had never seen one another before that day.

These officers were, on the part of the Spanish creoles – the General. Don Eusebio Moratín; the Duc de Mantone – the

Frenchman, who insisted that he should only be called Louis Dubois; and Don Juan Armero, a Montonero officer of the squadron of Zeno Cabral.

The Brazilians were represented by General Don Roque, the Marquis de Castelmelhor; Captain Don Sebastiao Vianna, his aide-de-camp; and another officer of an inferior grade, who plays too insignificant a part in this history for us to present him more formally to the reader.

The Marquis de Castelmelhor was no longer the elegant and handsome cavalier that we have seen in the former part of this narrative. Years, accumulating on his head, had furrowed his face with long wrinkles; the fire of his eye was deadened, so as to leave only a restless expression, sad and almost fierce; his hair had whitened, and his tall figure began to bow under the weight of the incessant fatigues of military life, or perhaps, as his enemies said – and the general had a great many – under the heavy burden of sharp remorse.

M. Dubois was still the same personage of ascetic features, of pale complexion, and of cold and stately manners.

After their mutual presentation, the six men examined each other curiously, secretly studying one another's features, to see where one could the best attack the other.

These officers, silent and sombre, thus looking at each other stealthily before commencing the conversation, rather resembled duellists making ready to fire at each other, than diplomatists assembled to discuss important political questions.

The marquis soon decided that if this silence were prolonged it would become more and more embarrassing for all; so having several times passed his hand over his forehead, as if to chase away some importunate thought, he took upon himself to speak.

"Caballeros," he said, claiming attention by a gesture, "I am glad that we are at last permitted to meet face to face. The occasion that presents itself is too precious for us not to take advantage of it like men of spirit, so as to try and smooth the apparently insurmountable difficult ties which have so long divided us, and which, animated as we are by truly patriotic sentiments, will not, I hope, exist many minutes longer."

"That is well said!" cried a mocking voice, coming from the interior of the wood, "And I should have been much annoyed had I not arrived in time to assist at so philanthropic a meeting."

The officers looked about with astonishment, which almost amounted to fear, on hearing the ironical accents of this voice, and started back, quickly putting their hands to their firearms.

"Is this treason?" cried the marquis, with an inquiring look at General Moratín.

At the same moment the shrubbery was parted, and a man bounded, rather than entered into the glade.

"Don Zeno Cabral!" cried the astounded Buenos Aireans.

"Yes, it is I, señores," mockingly answered the Montonero, removing his hat, and bowing courteously all round; "you did not expect me it seems?" And then, taking a step or two in advance; "I come opportunely, I think. Do not disturb yourselves; go on,

I beg. I am sorry I do not know the name of this caballero, but you will inform me, eh?" he added, bowing with an expression of biting sarcasm to the marquis. "The caballero was in the act of saying some very sensible thing which I should be very sorry further to interrupt."

CHAPTER XI

TIGERS AND FOXES

How had Don Zeno Cabral, whom we left in the midst of the Cordilleras, arrived thus unexpectedly to assist at this mysterious consultation? Scarcely had the sun risen, than the Montonero left the tent in which he had watched during the whole night, and ordered a soldier to go and seek Don Juan Armero.

The latter arrived in a few minutes.

"Listen, Don Juan," said Don Zeno Cabral, passing Don Juan's arm through his own, and, taking him on one side, he whispered to him, after assuring himself that no one could hear them, "You are devoted to me, are you not?"

"For life and death, general, as you know."

"Yes, I know, my friend; but the mission which I wish to confide to you is one of such high importance that I wanted to hear you repeat it."

The officer bowed without answering; the general resumed:

"Since I left you to go to the camp of the Pincheyras," said he, "I have learnt several things. While we are here to fight loyally, at the peril of our lives, to secure the independence of the country, it seems that down there, at Tucumán, those who govern us are, at this very time, spreading some very pretty nets. The proofs of their treason are nearly all in my hands; but they are not yet

sufficient for the blow that I wish to give them. I have conceived a bold project, the success of which entirely depends on you."

"Good!" said the officer; "Then be tranquil, general; I will answer for all!"

"Look here, Don Juan," added he, handing him a large letter, carefully sealed. "Take this paper; it contains your instructions; I have thought it better to give them to you in writing than verbally, so that you may not forget any circumstance when the moment of action arrives. You understand me?"

"Perfectly, general; when shall I set out?"

"Directly; you will take six men with you."

"What for, general?"

"You will afterwards know."

"Ah! Good! Go on."

"Yesterday there arrived with me in the camp, two loyalist officers, with whom I scarcely know what to do. However, as they are my guests, I wish to treat them with respect; you will accompany them till you see the Spanish advance posts, and there you will leave them. You understand that, during all the time they remain with you, you will pay them the most friendly attentions, and, if needs be, you will defend them."

"That shall be done, general. Well?"

"You will not open the letter containing your instructions till you have reached the plains; you will read those instructions carefully."

"I understand, general. Have you any other orders?"

"No, my friend; it only remains for me to urge you to be brave. I know you too well to doubt your courage, but be prudent; above all, succeed."

"I shall succeed; I swear it, on my honour."

"I rely on your word, my friend; and now, my dear Don Juan, it only remains to me to wish you a safe journey and good fortune, and to shake hands," added he.

"Eh, general? These are my companions during the journey, I suppose?" said Don Juan.

"Yes, they are," answered the Montonero, advancing towards the two Spaniards, who were coming to him evidently with the intention, of saluting him.

After exchanging preliminary compliments, Zeno Cabral frankly told them how the matter stood, certain that they could not be but satisfied with the prospect of so soon safely joining the army of which they formed a part. The Montonero was not deceived in his suppositions in this respect.

An hour afterwards, a little troop of horsemen, commanded by Don Juan Armero, and having with them the two Spanish officers, set out from the camp.

Zeno Cabral, for reasons which seemed to be very grave, remained two days more in the camp. Meanwhile, he was far from being inactive; scouts, chosen carefully from the most agile, brave, and skilful of his men, were continually sent out in all directions, and on their return to the camp they were immediately interrogated by the general.

At last, on the evening of the second day after the departure of Don Juan Armero, one of the scouts who had been absent since the previous evening, returned to the camp.

At the sight of this man the countenance of Don Zeno, who, during the whole day had been sad and uneasy, suddenly brightened. Zeno advanced rapidly towards him, and scarcely allowing him time to alight, he seized him by the arm and dragged him into his tent.

The scout at length went out and rejoined his companions, who, in their turn, wished to interrogate him, but all their efforts were in vain.

He had, probably, received from his chief strict injunctions in this respect, for he confined himself to answering yes or no to all the questions that were addressed to him.

On the next day, before sunrise, Zeno Cabral at last gave the order, so impatiently expected by the Montoneros, to raise the camp; then, when all the men had mounted, the chief called Captain Quiroga to him.

The old officer, whose eyes had been continuously fixed on his commandant, immediately ran to the call.

Zeno Cabral was one of those decided people who have a horror of long speeches.

"Don Sylvio," said he to his subordinate, "certain reasons, which it would be useless to explain, necessitate my entrusting the squadron to you."

"What, general!" cried he; "You have scarcely returned, and

you leave us already?"

"It must be so. While we are here, there are occurring in the towns yonder strange things, which it is my duty to watch. I have pointed out to you the route to be followed. Perhaps I shall rejoin you sooner than you think."

"God grant it, general."

"Thank you; good-bye for the present and keep up your spirits."

"Are you setting out alone, general?"

"Pardieu!" he exclaimed, smiling.

The old officer shook his head several times, with a melancholy air.

"Take care, general," he at last said; "these imprudences, I have a presentiment, will someday cost you dear."

"Bah! You are foolish to disquiet yourself thus, Don Sylvio. You will soon see me reappear, gay and in good trim, take my word for it."

And without listening any more to the old officer, who tried still to retain him, the young man drove the spurs into the sides of his horse, which started off at a gallop, and soon disappeared at the turn of the path.

For nearly three hours, notwithstanding the difficulties of the route which he followed, and which, in certain places became almost impracticable, the Montonero kept his horse going at a rapid pace; then, when he thought himself at a sufficient distance from his companions not to risk being overtaken by them, he

pulled the bridle, put his horse into a walk, and, allowing his head to fall on his breast, he gave himself up to his reflections.

In thus suddenly leaving his squadron, Don Zenó Cabral acted under the influence of serious thoughts. Since his departure from Tucumán, the political situation had been much altered. The independence of the Buenos Airean provinces – thanks to the treason of several chiefs of the revolutionary movement – was more than ever put in question.

Not that the chiefs had any thought of treating with the royalists, and of again placing their country under the detested yoke of Spain – such was not their intention, far from it. As always happens in critical periods, in a country where people have overturned one government, they seek to establish another; and ambitious designs, at first drowned in the ever-increasing flood of patriotism, already began to float to the surface. Leaders who, until now, had fought with the utmost devotion and enthusiasm for their country, thinking the moment favourable, spread their nets and planted their batteries, in the hope of turning the revolution to their own profit, and of making for themselves a dictator's toga, or a king's mantle from the bloodstained banners of independence, of which they had been the foremost soldiers.

The Montonero had accepted the revolution with that joy and enthusiasm which characterise exceptional natures. The first dangerous squadron which the insurgents had opposed to the royal troops was that which he still commanded, and which

he had, with rare devotion and disinterestedness, raised and equipped at his own expense. He had never raised himself up with the political intrigues which, from the first day of the rising, had distracted the colonies. Without personal ambition, deeply loving his country, Zeno Cabral was content to fight for it under all circumstances, and to place himself boldly in the front, generously offering his heart to the first blows of the enemy.

A man of Zeno Cabral's character, then, ought to put in the shade all those people of low ambition, and the vultures in their track, who seek an easy and productive prey in all great popular movements, who, in their sordid selfishness can see nothing but their own interest, and for whom the sacred name of country is but a mere sound.

The bold Montonero, whose daring enterprise had so often re-established the falling fortunes of the revolution – he who had always marched ahead without fear or doubt, when the boldest around him felt their faith fail – also had a number of secret and implacable enemies among men, whom the ever-strange circumstances of a revolution had thrown up from the crowd, and who now thought themselves called on to take the reins of the new government.

Some thought him a man of narrow views, and without political stability; others attributed to him an immeasurable ambition, and thought He was meditating projects, which he wanted only a favourable opportunity to put into motion; while others again thought him a harmless simpleton, ready to fight or

to be killed, without knowing why.

All feared him.

Two men especially had towards him a profound antipathy and an instinctive fear which nothing could dissipate.

These two men were the Duc de Mantone and General Don Eusebio Moratín.

Enemies at first, these two persons had not been long in understanding each other, and uniting in one idea the accomplishment of the same project, that they foresaw would at the moment of execution be met with an insurmountable obstacle which the Montonero alone could surmount. These two people, in fact, seemed made to understand one another.

M. Dubois, once an oratorian, and then a conventionalist, having served by turns all the governments which had existed for twenty years in France, and having betrayed one after the other, constrained to abandon Europe, had only sought refuge in America in the hope of regaining a fortune, and a position equivalent to that which he had lost. To attain this end it was necessary for him to fish in the troubled waters of revolution, and the insurrection of the Spanish colonies offered him the occasion that he had so ardently sought.

Resolved to obliterate the past, the fortuitous meeting that he had had with the French painter had been excessively disagreeable to him, on account of the rather edifying histories that Emile could, had he been asked, relate of the past life of Dubois. He had skilfully hidden the annoyance that the meeting

had caused him, had feigned the greatest joy at finding a fellow countryman in the land of exile, and under the semblance of great friendship, he had quietly tried to ruin him, in which he had nearly succeeded. The painter had only by a miracle escaped the trap set under his feet with such deep subtlety.

Arrived at Tucumán, and put in communication with General Don Eusebio Moratín, M. Dubois, with that experience of human nature that he possessed in so high a degree, had reckoned him up in a moment, and had said: That is the man who will give me back what I have lost.

His decision was at once made, and he manoeuvred accordingly. Don Eusebio aimed at nothing less than to be named president of the republic. M. Dubois resolved to aid him to arrive at power. A compact was agreed on between the two men, one of whom was a kind of savage animal, spoiled by a false civilisation, and the other a cold, wily, calculating man of ambition.

Zeno Cabral, who by his presence would have disturbed and probably defeated the dark schemes of these two persons, had under a pretext been removed, as well as his squadron, and their negotiations had been commenced.

Unhappily for the projects of Don Eusebio and M. Dubois, Zeno Cabral, although he was at a distance, was not the less to be feared, and perhaps was even more to be feared on account of his absence.

If the Montonero had a great many enemies, he numbered also some friends – honest men, and, like himself, devoted

to the public cause. These men, without having succeeded in completely unveiling the secret plots of the general and his acolyte, had succeeded, great as was the prudence of the two latter, in obtaining such an inkling of their projects as had enabled them pretty well to guess to what end their efforts were directed.

Incomplete as was this information, the friends of the Montonero had not hesitated, seeing the gravity of the circumstances, to warn him and tell him all that had passed in the town, at the meeting of the representatives of the ancient viceroyalty of Buenos Aires; but they had also told him all that they had succeeded in learning as to the secret projects of the French diplomatist and of General Moratín.

Zeno Cabral had for a long time had strong suspicions against these two men. His suspicions as to their loyalty had been several times aroused by the advances that Moratín had made towards himself, though they never dared to explain themselves clearly, for fear of disgracefully failing in presence of a man whose inflexible honour they were constrained to acknowledge.

From the evening before, the suspicions of the Montonero had suddenly changed into certainty. The last scout who had arrived at the camp had brought news of such grave importance that doubt was impossible in the presence of undeniable facts – facts the proof of which had been furnished in a decisive manner by the messenger.

General Moratín, thinking himself strong enough to proceed

openly, thanks to the support that a hired majority in the congress had given him, had suddenly thrown off the mask, and aimed, not at the presidency, but at the dictatorship of the Buenos Airean provinces, relying on one hand on the majority of which we have spoken, and on the other on the military forces long previously prepared by his agents, who by recent events had been brought about him, and whose aid in a coup de main appeared to him certain.

Without loss of time the general had caused himself to be proclaimed dictator on the marshes of Cabildo, amidst the applause of the populace; then he had dissolved the congress, which would henceforth be useless; formed a ministry, of which M. Dubois had been named president; issued manifestoes in all the provinces of the republic; and, after having placed Tucumán in a state of siege, made his troops camp on all the squares of the town, and imprisoned suspicious citizens – that is to say, those of an opinion opposed to his own. He inaugurated his dictatorship by condemning to death, and executing, in twenty-four hours, six of the most influential and the most justly esteemed men of the province.

Terror reigned in Tucumán; a military regime, the abuse of power, the scorn of private rights, had in the name of liberty inaugurated an era of blood and tears.

On learning this sad news, a shudder of horror had run through the limbs of the Montonero; the whole night was passed by him in sleepless anxiety. He shuddered with shame and indignation on

thinking of the abyss suddenly opened by the hideous ambition of this man without faith and without morality – an abyss in which was about to be engulfed for ever the independence of his country, and those privileges so dearly bought by ten years' obstinate struggle.

But Don Zeno Cabral was not only a good-hearted man, but one of those energetic natures, immovable in their convictions, who are rather excited than discouraged by obstacles, and who, rising with the danger, always find themselves on a level with the situation, whatever it may be, in which they are placed. At the break of day his resolution was taken – to save his country from the ruin with which it was threatened, whatever might be the consequences to himself. His plan carefully laid, he immediately proceeded to execute it. But as the Montonero was as prudent and wily as he was brave, notwithstanding the boundless confidence which he had in his companions, he allowed them to remain ignorant of the facts which had transpired in their absence. After having exacted from the scout that brought him the news a solemn promise to keep what he had learned a profound secret, he left his squadron, and boldly proceeded towards the low-lying ground, so as to obtain personally the information which was indispensable to him to put his projects into execution, maintaining some reserve, however, in case it might afterwards be necessary to fully acquaint his soldiers with all the facts, certain of the support that they would be sure to give him.

A journey through the Cordilleras was nothing for Zeno

Cabral, whose whole life had been passed in the Pampas.

But it was only towards the evening of the third day after his departure from the camp that he at last reached the plains, at the moment when the sun sank behind the horizon, and darkness began to envelope the landscape.

Zeno Cabral, fatigued by a long march, immediately sought a favourable spot to establish his camp.

The search was not long. Before him, a rather broad river, with ripples like emeralds, wound its devious course. Like an experienced man who had long known the localities which he traversed, the Montonero proceeded towards some rather high ground which projected itself into the bed of the river, and the barren tops and sides of which offered a safe refuge against stragglers – men or beasts – who in these llanos (plains) are incessantly on the watch for travellers.

CHAPTER XII

A DOUBLE DUEL

Although the Montonero had gained, thanks to the rapidity with which he travelled, the temperate climate of the Cordilleras, and already, felt, during the day, considerable heat, the nights were, nevertheless, cold and even frosty. The traveller was no further concerned about this fact, than to envelope himself carefully in his poncho, his blankets, and his pellones, before going to sleep. But, notwithstanding all these precautions, towards midnight the north wind became so sharp and the cold so piercing, that Don Zeno awoke, and after a desperate attempt to get to sleep again, was constrained to admit himself vanquished; he leaped up, half-frozen, from under his coverings, and proceeded to seat himself near the half-extinguished fire.

The night, illumined by the pale rays of the moon, was calm and beautiful; here and there the owlets flitted about, attracted by the hum of the horn beetles, on which they feed, and which fluttered round the fire; while the grey owls of the Pampa, gravely perched on the low branches of the trees, fixed, with a melancholy air, their round eyes on the encampment of the wanderer. In the distance, in the thickets, were heard the sad howlings of wolves, with which, at long intervals, was mingled a sonorous and piercing wail, immediately answered by another

of the same kind in an opposite direction. When this sinister wail arose on the air, all the cries of the desert were immediately stilled, and a trembling agitated the thickets under the frightened steps of the escaping animals, for they recognised the formidable cry of the cougar. The tyrant of the Pampa was in quest of prey, and was hunting in company with his family.

Zeno Cabral was too familiar with the sounds of the desert, to trouble himself with the howlings of the wild beasts, even though they seemed rapidly to approach the spot that he had chosen for his night encampment. He contented himself by speaking to his horse, tied a few paces off, and to soothe the poor animal, whom the growling of the tigers made to tremble; and he then returned to seat himself near the fire, giving up the idea of sleep, making a cigarette, and looking carelessly around him, rather from listlessness than from fear.

We have said that the night was splendid; the sky appeared a dome of diamonds, and the superb regulation which marked the landscape here and there, looked like dark masses, the outlines of which were sweetly brought out by the moonlight. Innumerable glow worms scattered brilliant sparks among the branches, while millions of invisible insects hummed or buzzed among the shrubbery.

These natural beauties, joined to the measured sound of the waves of a large river, which, like a silver ribbon, made its capricious windings a little distance off, and to the calm majesty of the night, presented a spectacle which, by degrees, excited the

impressionable mind of the bold Montonero, and plunged him into a melancholy reverie, in which all his faculties were soon so completely absorbed, that he not only lost the consciousness of the place in which he was, but of the disagreeable guests by which he was surrounded. In fact, he gave himself up to those mocking chimeras which sometimes visit the brain, and make us the sport of our own imaginations.

The Montonero had been for some time plunged in this reverie, when he felt himself struck by the same feeling of cold which, two hours before, had interrupted his sleep.

The young man raised his head, repressing a slight shiver, and wrapping himself in his poncho he looked around him.

Two men gravely crouched before the fire in front of him looked at him attentively, while they smoked their tobacco rolled in dry leaves. The two men were armed, their guns lying on their knees.

Notwithstanding the natural surprise that he manifested, on thus suddenly perceiving people whom he was far from expecting at that advanced hour of the night, and especially in the depths of the desert, the countenance of the Montonero remained impassive.

"Oh! Oh!" said he in Spanish, trying to distinguish through the curtain of flame that was between them, what sort of people they were with whom he had to do – whether they were friends or enemies – "You travel late, señores. No matter, you are welcome to my watch fire: if you are hungry or thirsty, speak – I have

some provisions which I shall be happy to share with you."

"The palefaces have their ears stopped when their eyes are closed," answered one of the strangers; "it is easy to get at them."

"That is true," answered the young man, smiling, for at the first word he had recognised his interlocutor; "you are right, Cougar; we whites, however great may be our knowledge of the desert, never reach that degree of perfection that you possess, and we allow ourselves to be surprised; but this time, if I have been so, it is by friends whom I am happy to see, for I was looking for them, and am glad to see them."

"Then," said Gueyma, smiling, "you have no rancour against us in thus suddenly surprising you?"

"Far from it; besides, do you not know that, in all places, and at all hours, I shall be charmed to receive your visits? But now comes it that you find yourselves in these latitudes just at the same time as I?"

"Have you, then, forgotten the meeting that you arranged?" asked the Cougar.

"Certainly not; but, if my calculations are right, you should have been here a long time already."

"In fact," pursued Gueyma, "we are three hours behind time."

"It is no reproach, chief, which I address to you; on the contrary, as I believe you will have already observed, I have had the liveliest desire to see you," eagerly answered the Montonero. "I repeat that I have sought you."

"That is well, and the Cougar has been well inspired, when,

on seeing the light of your fire, he induced me to come with him on the lookout."

"I acknowledge the prudence of the wisdom of the Cougar; thanks to him, we avoid a great loss of time for the realisation of our projects, the success of which, I with pleasure announce to you, is assured."

"Oh! Do you speak seriously, my brother?" cried Gueyma, with joy.

"You shall soon judge of that; but let us speak of preliminaries. You have been detained, you say?"

"Yes," answered the Cougar: "in the first place, we were joined by one of the principal chiefs of our tribe, who, at the head of a small detachment of warriors, crossed the desert to confirm us in the news that we had already received, as to the treason of the – "

"Ah?" cried Zeno Cabral. "And that chief was sent to you by – "

"By Tarou Niom himself," said the Cougar; "his name is Arnal," added he, darting a significant look at the Montonero.

"Arnal!" cried the latter, with a nervous start and a frown.

"My brother knows the chief, then?" asked Gueyma.

"I?" asked Zeno Cabral, with feigned indifference; "My brother is joking, no doubt; how should I know him?"

"Certainly, that is not to be expected, unless my brother has formerly traversed the hunting grounds of my tribe."

"I have never turned my horse's head in that direction. The

chief has doubtless returned, then, after having accomplished his mission."

"No; he has remained with us," said the Cougar, "but our troop has since been increased."

"Other warriors have joined it?"

"No, they are travellers; whites."

"Whites?"

"Yes, six of them."

"Ah," cried the Montonero, with a strange expression, "white travellers in these parts, at this time of the year, is very singular; perhaps they are enemies, who have been surprised by you, as I myself have been."

"No, they are visitors; they have, of their own accord, presented themselves to us and claimed our aid."

"And?" said he, with ill-concealed anxiety.

"We have received them according to the laws of Indian hospitality; they are our brothers, and Arnal insisted that we should treat them as such."

"Confound it!" cried the Montonero, stamping with rage, as he rose.

"Is this news bad, then, for my brother?" asked Gueyma.

But Zeno Cabral had, by a violent effort, already regained self-possession.

"My brother is deceived," he answered, smiling. "This news does not concern me in any way. What are these men to me?"

"Two of them are women," slyly remarked the Cougar.

The Montonero feigned not to hear this observation. He turned away to hide the trouble that it caused him, and, leaning his head forward:

"Do you hear?" he said, making a sign for them to listen.

"We have heard that for some time," answered Gueyma.

"The wild beasts approach; they are roaming about. I do not know how it is, I feel a great desire to kill them," said the Montonero.

"A desire easy to satisfy," answered the old chief, "The lions will be here before ten minutes."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. Listen."

The three men had risen, and, with hands on their firearms, their bodies leaning forward, their eyes fixed on the thickets, and their ears on the watch, they remained stationary. No sound was heard but those undefined noises which are peculiar to the desert during the night.

Suddenly a trembling and a cracking of branches was heard in the woods which adjoined the camp. Then, in two or three minutes, the same trembling was repeated on the opposite side, on the sombre edge of the forest, and in the low branches of a tree, in the midst of a thicket of leaves, appeared, brilliant as two fire brands, the eyes of a wild beast.

The animal, after a moment of fear, advanced a little, throwing frightened looks to the right and the left. Then he commenced to creep gently along the branch on which he was placed, and

soon all his body emerged from the shade, and stood out boldly in the light.

It was a cougar, or lion of America, of the most beautiful kind, and all the maturity of age, as was easy to see by its skin, which, instead of being of a woolly texture, crossed by little brown streaks, was of an agreeable and uniform tawny colour, without any admixture. Its ears, which were thrown back, were black, as well as the end of its tail. Its length was about seven feet.

It was lying, or rather crouching, on the branch. Its head was placed on its paws, which were stretched out. Its tail lashed its sides with force, and its eyes were directed with a strange gaze on the fire behind which the three men were hidden. After some minutes of this singular contemplation, the lion opened its mouth tremendously wide, and uttered a harsh growl. At the same instant a similar growl burst forth, but so startling and so near, that the three men started, and became alert in a moment.

At about twenty paces at the most from them, hidden in the same way in the low branches of a tree, a second cougar, just like the first, fixed on them his glaring eyes.

The situation became complicated.

"Well," said the Montonero, "we are more happy than we thought. Instead of one lion, we have two."

"Perhaps we shall have three," answered Gueyma.

"Abundance of good will not hurt us. But, however, that would astonish me."

"Listen," resumed the chief.

In fact a strong agitation, resembling that of a hasty march in the thicket, was heard.

"This is not the sound caused by a wild beast," murmured the old chief, shaking his head. "It is the step of a man."

"A man!" cried Gueyma and the Montonero; "It is impossible."

At the same moment the underwood was divided, and a man leaped into the midst of the camp.

It was no other than Emile Gagnepain.

His chest was heaving; notwithstanding the cold, his countenance, perspiring freely, bore witness to the violent exercise which he had undergone, and the rapid course which he had just made through the thickets, in the midst of which he had left his hat and even scraps of his clothes.

He held a double-barrelled gun in his hand. At first, blinded by the sudden transition from darkness to light, the young man could distinguish but imperfectly the persons to whom he had so abruptly introduced himself, but he soon distinguished the two Indians.

"Ah! Pardieu, gentlemen," cried he, getting his breath with difficulty; "I have been hunting this wild beast for the last three hours; I hope you will let me kill this magnificent animal."

"Be it so!" courteously answered the two Indians, putting the butt of their guns to the ground.

"But in case of danger, I shall be ready to come to your aid," said Zeno Cabral.

The painter turned quickly.

"Ah! It is you, Don Zeno!" said he, giving him his hand.

"What a singular meeting!"

"Very singular!"

"Why does not the animal stir?"

"For a very simple reason – because he fears to do so."

"You think so?"

"Certainly, but be easy; he, or rather they, will soon take courage."

"What do you mean by they?"

"Why, look on this side; here is a second cougar, I think."

"Upon my word, that's true. How shall we kill both?"

"I will aid you."

"You are very good. I confess that I am already slightly embarrassed in regard to the first, without wishing to tackle the second."

"The second is a female."

"What a misfortune," said the painter laughingly, "to carry trouble into a household that appears so united! Eh, but," he added, "they are waking up, I think."

"Attention! They will not be long before they attack us."

The Indian chiefs had remarked with astonishment the recognition between the two men; but as the time was not propitious for an explanation, they were contented to exchange a significant look.

Meanwhile, although only ten minutes had passed since the

sudden apparition of the cougars and the unforeseen arrival of the young Frenchman, the beasts remained passive on their respective branches. This fact, which may seem extraordinary, ought to be explained.

Although the cougar is the greatest and most powerful carnivorous animal of South America – committing enormous ravages among the flocks, and attacking generally all the animals that he meets – he flies away from man, for whom he has an instinctive horror. It is only when pushed to the last extremity, and literally to save his own life, that he at last resolves to face his assailant; but then he becomes terrible, defends himself with unparalleled desperation, will not retreat an inch, and only falls when dead.

The two lions, male and female, had at sunset left their den to go in pursuit of prey. After having traversed the desert in all directions, they saw the fire or the Montonero's encampment, and, attracted by the light, they gradually approached it, creeping along with that light and elegant suppleness which characterises the feline race, bounding from tree to tree, gliding along the branches. But on seeing the men motionless and firm before them, they had immediately stopped, doubtless hoping that they would not be discovered by their implacable enemy, and apparently contemplating seeking their safety in immediate flight. But when the hunters had risen and had seized their arms, the cougars had perceived that all chance of safety had gone, and they prepared to fight; then, having uttered a roar to give a mutual

warning, they seemed to think it a favourable moment to spring upon the hunters.

At the cry of warning by the Montonero, Emile had suddenly darted backward and shouldered his gun.

Almost immediately the two wild animals, as if by mutual agreement, uttered a roar of anger, and darting at once with a terrible bound, they threw themselves upon the hunters.

But the latter were on their guard; without retreating a step, they attacked the animals as they leaped, and seizing their guns by the barrel, they fought body to body with the animals. It was a terrible and desperate combat.

Emile, although it was the first time he had found himself an actor in so dangerous a hunt, and the first time he had seen such awkward game, exhibited remarkable coolness, not slipping the trigger of his gun till he had taken very careful aim of his adversary, and then, when his piece was discharged, he abandoned it to take two pistols from his girdle.

The two Indians had succeeded in easily overcoming the lioness, which Gueyma had seriously wounded in the right shoulder, whilst the ball of the old chief had broken its loins. The animal had fallen nearly dead, and the last convulsions of its agony were all they had to fear; the struggle in this direction had not been long.

But as to the lion, it was a very different affair. Although the two balls of the hunters had pierced his body, his leap had nevertheless been so well calculated, that he had actually sprung

on the Montonero. The latter, overturned by the shock, had rolled a few paces, horribly torn, bruised, and half fainting, and consequently not in a position to defend himself.

The animal had been stunned by the prodigious leap that he had made. Weakened by the blood that he was losing, and that was flowing in streams from his wounds, he remained a minute motionless on his trembling haunches; then uttering a dull growl of rage, and hollowing the sand with his powerful paws, he seemed to be gathering his strength to leap again on the enemy, who was stretched on the ground a few paces before him.

Emile, under these desperate circumstances, consulting only his own heart and the horrible situation of the Montonero, resolved to save him even at the peril of his own life. Loading his pistols, he threw himself boldly between the man and the lion.

The animal, startled and perhaps frightened by the sudden apparition of this new adversary, who placed himself so boldly at but a few paces from him, crouched close to the ground, with his ears hanging down, and looked at him with a malicious air, uttering a dull and sullen growl, which, with animals of the feline tribe, denotes the last paroxysm of rage.

"Upon my word," murmured the Frenchman, with a sly smile, looking his formidable adversary in the face, "this is what I call a splendid duel, and if I fall, it will at least be under the efforts of a lion – that is some comfort."

And he burst into such a hearty fit of laughter, that the Indian chiefs, notwithstanding their habitual self-control, could

not repress a gesture of astonishment. They thought that fright had driven away the senses of the Frenchman.

But Emile had never been more master of himself; his mind had never been clearer, or his coolness greater; but Frenchman, and above all Parisian as he was, the devil-me-care spirit of the gamin had become paramount, and he would not play the game of life and death without risking a last joke.

While speaking thus he had coolly raised his pistols, and at the moment when the lion was nerving himself to spring upon him, he fired.

The animal bounded from the spot, uttering a terrible howl, and fell dead.

"Upon my word," said the painter, laughing, "I thought it was more difficult than that; the lion seems to me to have gained a false reputation, or else he must have considerably degenerated; no matter, it is very diverting sport."

After this soliloquy, he hastened towards Zeno Cabral, near whom were the two chiefs.

The former had regained consciousness, and assisted by his friends he attempted to stand up – ashamed, bold and expert sportsman as he was, that he had been so rudely overcome by a wild beast.

On seeing the young man, who held out his hand to him smiling, an expression of gratitude illumined his manly countenance.

"Don Emile," said he, with deep emotion, "once more I owe

you my life; I shall never be able to pay my debt."

"Perhaps, señor," answered the young man significantly.

"Oh!" cried he, earnestly, "I swear to you, Don Emile, by all that is sacred in the world, that whatever you ask of me, at whatever time, or in whatever place, I will do it without hesitation, even if it risked that life which you have twice saved, and which henceforth belongs to you."

"I rely upon your word, Señor Don Zeno," seriously answered the young man; "I will remind you of it, if occasion requires."

"You will always find me ready to keep my word."

Too weak to remain longer standing, he seated himself before the fire, and his friends took their places by his side.

CHAPTER XIII

EXPLANATIONS

The fire had been lighted; the four men, conquered by sleep, and fatigued by the struggle which they had had with the lions, were wrapped in their ponchos and their blankets, and were not long in getting to sleep.

When the sun appeared on the horizon, the four men awoke nearly at the same time.

Zeno Cabral, thanks to the repose that he had taken, had recovered, and, apart from some feebleness of speech, he awoke fresh, and in a condition to continue his journey.

The first care of the Montonero on awaking was to rise and run to his horse, which he began carefully to groom, and then gave him some provender.

This duty accomplished, the young man returned to his companions, who had carelessly and without curiosity noticed his movements.

As to the painter, he had drawn from his game bag some palomas, had plucked them, and spitting them on the ramrod of his gun, had placed them over the fire, placing at the same time some sweet potatoes on the hot embers.

The Frenchman was thinking of refreshment; the events of the night had sharpened his appetite, and made him ready for

breakfast.

The great haste which the Montonero had exhibited with regard to his horse was but a pretext for him to put his ideas in order, and to prepare to answer questions which the Indian chiefs would no doubt put to him. The surprise that they had manifested on seeing that he knew Don Emile had not escaped him; he did not wish to give them time for their doubts to change into suspicions; he knew the instinctive distrust of the Indians, and it was of the greatest importance to him not to arouse it; he therefore resolved to confront the difficulty so as to avoid disagreeable remarks.

"Eh, Don Emile!" said he gaily to the young painter, taking his seat by his side; "You are a man of precaution, it seems to me that's a succulent breakfast that you are preparing there."

"A breakfast of which you and these caballeros will take part, I hope," graciously answered the young man.

"As to me, I accept your offer with the greatest pleasure; but," added he, changing his tone, "will you permit me to ask you a question?"

"Two, if you like, señor."

"You will pardon this apparent indiscretion, for which the interest I have in you is the only excuse."

"I am persuaded of it, señor; but you can speak. I have not, thank God, occasion to fear any indiscretion."

"If that is the case – and I congratulate you on it – I will explain myself without fear."

"Pardieu!" said Emile, turning the spit on which he was concentrating all his attention; "Speak, my dear sir; do not hesitate the least in the world."

The two chiefs, apparently indifferent to this conversation, which they understood perfectly, for it was carried on in Spanish, listened attentively to it.

"In the first place," pursued the Montonero, "let me express my astonishment at meeting you here, when I thought you were very far off."

"The matter is very simple however. After the storm that had assailed us near the Valle del Tambo, when you had left us as well as Señor Pincheyra, I confess that my companions and I were much embarrassed."

"What! Señor Don Pablo Pincheyra left you suddenly?" cried the Montonero, feigning surprise.

"Mon Dieu! Yes," answered the young man, good naturedly; "he pretended that we were too far from his camp for his escort to be useful to us, and that, since you thought fit to attend to your affairs, he did not see any reason why he should not attend to his; and thereupon made us his compliments, and went away – of which, between ourselves, I was very glad, for notwithstanding all the courtesy which Don Pablo has manifested towards us, his company, I confess, was not at all agreeable to me."

"But the persons with whom I had set out from the camp of Casa-Frama, and whom I had commended to you before my departure?"

"Señor Don Pablo did not concern himself with them, and after having taken leave of me in a few words, he set off with his partisans."

"Ah! And then?"

"Then I also set out, a little embarrassed, as I have already told you. Happily for me, and for the persons who accompanied me, at the moment when lost in the mountains, we wandered through unknown paths without knowing where to direct our steps, Providence sent us a numerous troop of Indian horsemen."

"What!" quickly interrupted Zeno Cabral; "These whites of whom you spoke to me last night, chief –"

"That caballero and the persons of his suite," answered the old chief, affirmatively nodding his head.

"That, upon my word, is a very extraordinary incident. When the chief spoke to me on the subject, I boldly answered that I did not know you."

All the suspicions of the chief had suddenly vanished before this frank explanation.

The Montonero understood that he had attained the end which he sought.

"You have no other questions to ask me, señor," said the painter, in a slightly jeering tone.

"Well, I will ask you one thing more."

"Do so; I will answer you."

"Well, I should like to know if chance, alone, has brought you here?"

"The two wild animals brought me here," answered the young man, in a somewhat sardonic tone.

"Which means – ?"

"Simply this – wakened by the roar of the lions, the thought suddenly occurred to me to chase them. As soon as my resolution was taken, I rose, seized my gun, and, without any other indications than the roar of the animals, I immediately pursued them. Chance led them here, and I followed them; that is the whole history – are you satisfied with it?" added he.

"Perfectly, my dear sir," answered the Montonero, and mentally adding – "this lion hunt is only a pretext; it conceals something from me; I will watch."

"And now, if you like, señor," resumed the young man, "we will take breakfast."

"With all my heart," answered the Montonero.

The palomas were taken from the spit, the sweet potatoes drawn from under the embers, and the breakfast began. We need not add that the four people did justice to this improvised repast.

The meal finished – and it did not last more than a quarter of an hour, for the dangers of desert life induced frugality – the cigarettes were lighted.

"I think," said Emile, addressing the chiefs, "that it is time for us to return to the camp. If nothing detains Don Zeno Cabral in this place, he will perhaps do us the honour to accompany us."

"It would be with the greatest pleasure that I should accept your obliging offer, caballero," answered the partisan.

"Unhappily, my way is diametrically opposite to that in which you are going."

"Permit me, then, caballero, to take leave of you," answered the young man, rising.

"You will not go away without taking the skin of your lion."

"And that of the lioness, that I am happy to offer you," added Gueyma

"I thank you, and accept your offer joyfully," said the young man; "unhappily, I do not know how to proceed to skin these noble animals."

"Will you permit us to say a few words to our friend? We shall then be happy to render you this service."

"Very well, gentlemen, I am at your orders," answered the young man, stretching himself again upon the grass; and he mentally added – "Perhaps I shall thus learn something."

But the painter's hope was completely deceived; it was in vain for him to pay the most earnest attention; it was impossible for him not to hear, for they spoke in a very high voice, but to understand a word of the conversation, for the simple reason that, either from mistrust or because they could more easily express their thoughts in that language, the conversation of the three men took place in Guaycurus.

The conversation lasted for more than an hour, in a very animated way; at last, Zeno Cabral turned towards Emile, who was still lying on the grass, and carelessly smoking his cigar. Extending his hand to him, he said in a friendly tone —

"I am going, Señor Don Emile; we leave on good terms, I hope?"

"I do not see why it should be otherwise, señor," answered the young man, taking the hand that was extended to him.

"Thank you; adieu, Don Emile," and he went towards his horse, that he began to saddle and bridle.

The French painter had risen, and had gone to the wild beasts, which the Indian chiefs, as soon as their conversation was ended, had proceeded to skin. The young man was anxious to be present at this curious operation, which the Guaycurus, armed only with their knives, executed with unimaginable skill and rapidity.

"Don Emile!" cried Zeno Cabral.

"What do you want with me, señor?" answered the latter.

"Not adieu; it is au revoir that I ought to have said; I do not know how it is, but I have the conviction that we shall soon see one another again."

"And I, too," answered the painter.

"What do you mean?" asked Zeno Cabral.

"Nothing more than what you say yourself, señor; you have a conviction – I have a presentiment – is there anything astonishing in that?"

The partisan looked at him with profound attention; then, appearing to take a sudden resolution —

"Au revoir, Señor Don Emile," said he, in a sorrowful voice; and lifting his hand to his hat, which he slightly raised, set off at a full gallop.

The young man followed him some time with his eyes along the windings of the route; when at last he had disappeared on the border of a forest, into which he plunged without slackening his pace, the painter shook his head.

"There is evidently something in the wind; I must watch more than ever!"

The two chiefs, after having skinned the lions, were proceeding to rub the inside of the skins with ashes, so as to preserve them from decomposition until they could dry them in the sun.

It was about seven o'clock in the morning. The camp of the Guaycurus was not more than half a league from the spot where the partisan had established himself for the night; the distance, then, could be accomplished in very little time.

"Well!" asked the painter, "What shall we do now, chiefs?"

"What you like, señor," answered the Cougar; "the skins are prepared; it only remains for us to shoulder them."

"That shall devolve on me," said the young man; "I have already given you sufficient trouble."

The old chief smiled gently.

"Let me carry one, and you shall take the other."

The painter offered no further objection; he soon felt the justice of the remark of the old Indian. The skin that he had taken on his shoulders still wet, was very heavy and difficult to carry.

As there was nothing else to do in the partisans' camp, they then set off left the bloodstained bodies of the lions to the

vultures, who had been for a long time wheeling above them, and who swooped down immediately the men had disappeared.

The latter had resumed – walking with that gymnastic step peculiar to the Indians, and which, in a very short time, enables them to cover a great deal of ground – the way to their camp, followed with great difficulty by the Frenchman, who was nearly all the time forced to run to keep up with them.

We will now explain to the reader what motive had led the young man so suddenly to the camp of Zeno Cabral.

To do this we must go back a few hours to the moment when the Cougar and Gueyma, after having conversed a long time with Arnal round the council fire, had risen, and made the tour of the camp to assure themselves that everyone was asleep, and had then gone away under the pretext that they were going to reconnoitre a spot where they had seen a fire in the night, shining like a solitary lighthouse at a short distance off.

After their departure, Arnal made sure of the calm sleep of Dove's Eye, spread several furs over her, and then, wrapping himself in his furs, the chief lay down not far from the young girl, and was soon asleep.

The Indians keep but a poor lookout when they do not suspect enemies near them.

In the desert where the Guaycurus were now camped, a surprise was not to be feared; moreover, their two most experienced chiefs were on the lookout, and would warn them of the least danger.

Half an hour after the departure of the chiefs, Emile Gagnepain, comfortably lying near a fire, removed the furs which covered his face.

There was the most profound silence in the camp.

After a careful examination, the young man, convinced that all the warriors were asleep, and that consequently no one would notice him, rose, passed his pistols through his girdle, and seized his gun.

Light as were the steps of the painter, a man heard him, and abruptly raised his head. Emile inclined his ear, said a few words, and the other lay down again without taking any further notice of him.

The young man entered the enramada, which served for a refuge to the marchioness and her daughter. The marchioness did not sleep; with her back supported against the trunk of a tree, she held on her knees the charming head of her daughter, plunged in a calm and refreshing sleep.

The marchioness raised her head on the arrival of the young man; she seemed to be anxious to question him. But the latter quickly put a finger to his lips to recommend prudence, and took his place by her side, not, however, without having cast on the sweet countenance of Doña Eva a look full of love and admiration.

The marchioness, rendered anxious by the visit of the young man at such an hour, impatiently waited for him to speak.

"Reassure yourself, Madame," said he, in a low voice; "up to

the present time, God be praised, we have not, I think, anything to fear."

"But," she answered in the same tone, "you have not interrupted your sleep without important reasons."

"I have, indeed, a motive in coming here, Madame, but this motive only arises from fears and suspicions."

"Explain yourself, I beg, Don Emile."

"The fact is this, Madame. For several days I have heard frequently the name of your implacable enemy, Don Zeno Cabral."

"Ah!" said she, with sudden emotion. "These people are his friends. We are lost!"

"Do not go so fast or so far, Madame; although we should certainly redouble our precautions, and keep ourselves on our guard."

"Dear Don Emile, do not leave me in this situation. Something has happened, has there not?"

"Of what is passing I am ignorant, Madame; only, in case there should be anything important, I am resolved to know it. That is why I have ventured to disturb your repose."

"But what is it that has happened?" pursued she.

"Less than nothing, Madame."

"Ah, you at last avow – I knew well that – "

"Pardon, Madame," interrupted he, quickly; "you misunderstand me, here is the fact in a few words."

"Tell me quickly, I beg you."

"This evening," the young man resumed, "the three Guaycurus chiefs had a long conversation round the council fire; then, after this conversation, the Cougar and Gueyma, after having gone the round of the camp, set out, to go, as they said, and reconnoitre on foot."

The marchioness remained a short time in a reverie, and then, raising her head —

"I do not think that is anything extraordinary, or that it should disquiet us," said she.

"There would be nothing, indeed, disquieting in this sortie," answered he, "if it had not been induced by a motive."

"It has a motive?"

"Yes, Madame. Without doubt the desire of visiting the people camped near us, whose fire can be seen shining in the darkness."

"Oh!" she said, with a thrill of fear, "You are right; that is serious. What do you intend doing?"

"I intend to set out from the camp to follow the two chiefs to this encampment, where, perhaps, I shall meet faces that I know."

"You run great danger in this excursion," said the marchioness.

"I thank you sincerely for this good opinion, Madame, and to justify it I shall set out as soon as possible."

"Mon Dieu! If you are discovered!"

"I will take precautions not to be so, Madame."

"These Indians are so crafty."

"Bah! If they discover me I shall get out of it by inventing some pretext or other. But I wish to assure myself whether my conjectures are true. I leave you, Madame."

"Go then, since you insist on it," answered she, with sadness, "and heaven bless you."

The young man bowed respectfully to the marchioness, and quitted the enramada. At his exit from the camp, a sentinel half opened his eyes.

"Where are you going, brother?" asked the Indian.

"I have been wakened by the wild beasts. I cannot sleep, and am going to kill one of them."

"Success to you," answered the sentinel.

Lying on the ground, again he closed his eyes.

"Good," said Emile, as soon as he was alone. "I have no further need of secrecy now. This sleepy sentinel has done well to question me abruptly. Thanks to him, I have found what I was seeking."

Things had turned out better for the Frenchman than he had dared to hope; for he had no occasion to offer his pretext, and his explanation with Zeno Cabral was quite friendly.

CHAPTER XIV

EVENTS

Great was the surprise of the marchioness when, at about eight o'clock in the morning, she saw the young painter enter the camp, in company with the two Guaycurus chiefs, and bearing boldly on his shoulders the spoils of a lion, that terrible king of the desert.

The long absence of the young man, which was, as we have said, prolonged during the whole night, began seriously to disquiet the marchioness, who, like many persons tried by long misfortunes, was ready to think that even the most common events would have lamentable results. Already, giving freedom to her thoughts, she pictured to herself the young man surprised by the Indians in the act of spying, being killed by them; and she reproached herself with this supposed death, as if she had really been the cause of it. The remarks of her daughter and those of Tyro, to whom she had related her interview with the painter, did not tend to reassure her, although Tyro, who was the man to whom the young man had spoken before entering the enramada, told him he was certain that it was not probable that his master had been the victim of his curiosity, as, if it had been so, the chiefs would have immediately returned to the camp, and he (Tyro) as well as all the persons in the suite of the young man, would have been interrogated by them, to learn what reason Don

Emile had for acting the spy upon them.

The marchioness, acutely sensitive from long suffering, would not hear anything, and as the time passed her anxiety became more poignant.

But when she perceived the young man, whose bearing was so calm, and whose countenance was so radiant, a sudden reaction took place in her, and she immediately passed from the most profound sadness to the most lively joy.

The warriors, excited by the arrival of their chiefs, and especially by the kind of triumphal entry which they made with the skins of the lions carried on their shoulders, had met at the entry of the camp, where they shouted with joy, and loudly clapped their hands, forgetting in their enthusiasm the mask of impassibility that they usually bore on their countenances.

The Cougar and Gueyma – men habituated to similar ovations for such prowess – did not hesitate to give to the young Frenchman the honour that was due to him in the death of the lions, and related in all its details the event as it had happened; and then Gueyma gave to Emile the skin which up to that moment he had kept on his shoulder.

At this action, done so generously before all the assembled warriors, the shouts redoubled, and the enthusiasm was carried to its height.

The Guaycurus who till then had held the Frenchman in somewhat poor esteem, by reason of the instinctive dislike which they have for the whites generally, exhibited towards him marks

of general consideration, for the young man had manifested great courage – a virtue which the Indians honour above all others.

Emile, delighted at his unexpected ovation – not that his pride was flattered by the praises which the Guaycurus addressed to him, but because he hoped that, thanks to the turn of opinion in his favour, he would enjoy more liberty among the Indians, and thus could better protect the ladies – did not notice, any further than he was obliged, the infatuation of which he was the object, and, accompanied by Tyro, who had loaded himself with the skins which he much admired, proceeded hastily towards the enramada, to give the marchioness an account of his expedition during the night.

The two ladies, seated side by side before the enramada, protected by the gauchos, who were a few paces off, understood nothing of what had passed in the camp, and of the joyous cries that the Indians incessantly uttered. Their complete ignorance of the Guaycurus language caused them to suffer secret disquiet, not knowing to what cause to attribute the general commotion. They were too far from the theatre of action to form a correct judgment of what was passing, but near enough to see that the young painter was the centre of a group of warriors, who gesticulated with animation, and, as they supposed, with anger. It was therefore with pleasure that the marchioness and her daughter saw the young man, at last rid of those who had surrounded him, running towards them.

The marchioness was very anxious to hear the news. She

scarcely allowed the Frenchman to salute her, so great was her excitement.

Emile related to her, point by point, all that had passed between him and the hunters since his departure from the camp, especially laying stress on the manner in which the two chiefs had proceeded to the spot where the solitary fire was burning.

After this recital, that the marchioness had listened to with sustained interest, there was a pause.

"So," said the marchioness, at last, "you think it is certain that this man really expected the two Guaycurus chiefs."

"I would swear it, señora," answered the young man. "Concealed in the woods for some time, not only all their words reached my ear distinctly, but even the very play of their faces could not escape me. The manner in which they accosted each other, the first words that they exchanged, convinced me that the chiefs knew very well that they would meet the partisan in that place, and that moreover they were intimately connected with him."

"That man is strange, his conduct is incomprehensible," murmured the marchioness, sorrowfully; "everywhere I find himself on my steps, devoted to my ruin, and, moreover, apparently with power almost without limits. What is to be done?" she added, allowing her head to sink in sadness on her breast.

The marchioness, speaking thus, had rather answered her, secret thoughts than the words of the young man; but feebly as

this remark had been made, the painter had heard it.

"Madame," he answered, with an accent of tenderness, veiled by profound grief, "I am but a stranger, thrown by chance on this strange land, without friend or support. But I do not despair – I who have devoted my existence to serve you – I fight continually against your numerous enemies. Why should you not do for yourself what I have tried with all the ardour of sincere devotion? Why should you be disheartened when nothing yet proves that we shall fail in the struggle that we have so long sustained, without having up to the present, time met with a real check? Is not our situation really better than it was when we found ourselves at Tucumán, in the hands of your enemies, or prisoners of the Pincheyras at Casa-Frama? Reflect, Madame, and believe me; do not doubt the power and justice of God. He has taken your cause in hand, and He will save you."

"Will He do so?" sorrowfully murmured the marchioness, as she lowered her head to conceal the tears which, in spite of her, filled her eyes.

"Oh, mother," said Doña Eva with tenderness, furtively grasping her hand, fearing, on account of the costume which she wore, to make any manifestations which might have divulged the fact of her being disguised.

"Alas!" pursued the marchioness with that feverish impatience which wounds those who are misunderstood by those whom they address, "Neither of you understand the real situation in which fate has placed us. Our prison is not the less real because

it has no visible bounds it is larger, that is all. In place of being shut up in stone walls, we are held prisoners by the walls that our forests, mountains, and rivers form around us. Our persecutor, certain that it is impossible for us to escape, disdains to show himself to us, or to make us feel the weight of the chain fastened to our bodies; he contents himself with watching us from afar, allowing us an appearance of liberty that he will take from us when he thinks necessary. For a long time his plan has been known to me. I have reckoned up this man; hatred is clairvoyant – nothing can hide it. In a week – tomorrow, or today perhaps – you will see him suddenly rise, like an evil genius, before us; all will then be finished and we shall be ruined."

Emile and the young girl did not try to answer these words, the justice of which, however, struck them. Emile, who never concealed from himself the desperate position of the marchioness, and whom devotion, and another sentiment, perhaps, that he did not dare to avow, alone kept near her, felt the uselessness of common consolations. It was evident to him that no human power could succeed in snatching the two ladies from the pursuit of their enemy, and that, unless by a miracle they would positively be lost.

Meanwhile the enthusiasm of the Guaycurus had become somewhat calm. On the order of the chiefs they were occupying themselves, with their ordinary activity, in the preparations for their departure, and were about to mount their horses to descend to the plains, where they hoped to encamp the same evening.

Soon each one was in the saddle; the word "advance" was given, and the troop left the camp.

Emile and Tyro were, side by side, talking in a low voice, followed at a short distance by the two ladies, and as they supposed by the gauchos, who conducted the baggage mules.

The descent, although rapid, was easy, as generally happens in those countries where the roads are unknown, and the path traced, for the most part, by wild beasts. The Indians followed the bed of a dry torrent and everything appeared to indicate that long before the setting of the sun they would reach a spot suitable for encamping, on the borders of a little river, the waters of which, sparkling in the rays of the sun, appeared at some distance in the plain, through the high grass.

This river, named the Rio Bermejo, was an affluent of the Rio Paraguay, and served as a natural frontier to the immense plain known under the name of the llano de Manso, and which, nearly unknown at that epoch, was only traversed by untamed hordes of Indian bravos, for whom it formed a hunting territory abounding in game.

The Guaycurus had just forded the Rio Quachifras, a considerable affluent of the Rio Parana, but nearly dry at that season of the year. The Cougar gave the order to camp on the border of a wood of cotton trees, that the horses might repose during the great heat of the day.

The ladies, fatigued with this long journey (for they had been travelling for nearly five hours), withdrew on one side to take

a little repose, which they absolutely needed. Emile prepared to do the same, leaving to Tyro the care of the mules and the horses, and already he had comfortably installed himself in some shrubbery perfectly sheltered from the sun, when he perceived the two gauchos stopping before him, each with his carbine in one hand, and his hat in the other.

The young man looked for a moment at these two honest acolytes – for whom, we may say, he had a profound aversion, though he took good care to hide this feeling from them – and to his great discomfort he thought he saw on the faces of the two rascals an expression which gave him cause for reflection.

The gauchos remained before him silent and motionless. The young man, wishing to put an end to this embarrassing situation, decided to speak to them.

"What do you wish, señores?" he asked.

The two brothers exchanged a stealthy look of intelligence, appearing to invite each other to speak first; but it appeared that neither knew how to commence, for they contented themselves by bowing without answering.

"Upon my word, gentlemen," said Emile, impatient at this dumb show, which he did not understand, "since you will not speak, permit me to have my siesta. I have a great desire to sleep, and I shall be obliged if you will leave me to repose."

"We also, caballero," answered Sacatripas, at last deciding to speak, "we also want sleep, for the sun is very hot, and we have no intention to keep you long; only we desire to have a few words

with you."

"Is the affair important, Señor Sacatripas?"

"Very important! – at least for us, caballero," answered Mataseis, becoming bolder.

"Very well," said Emile, "then go on quickly, I beg you; I am listening."

"Señor," pursued Sacatripas, recovering from the passing emotion which he had experienced, and assuming an agreeable air, "you can recall, I suppose, the conditions which we have had the honour of making with you."

"That is to say, with Señor Tyro?"

"With Señor Tyro, caballero; pardon me if I insist on that point – you remember it?"

"I confess, in all humility, señor, that I do but vaguely recall these conditions, and that I should be much obliged to you to refresh my memory on this subject."

"Very well, caballero," said Mataseis, intervening with a gracious smile; "we stipulated that eight days before the end of each month we should tell you if we consented to remain in your service."

"Ah! Very good – I believe that clause exists. Well."

"Señor," interrupted Sacatripas, with a courteous bow, "it is three weeks since the month commenced."

"What has that to do with your conditions?"

"It seems to me, caballero, that it has much to do with them," resumed Mataseis.

"So," sharply answered Emile, "it is your congé that you ask of me, is it, señores?"

The two bandits made a gracious salute, no doubt flattered at having been so well understood.

"I have neither the right, the power, nor the desire to retain you in my service against your will. Since the service is no longer agreeable to you, there is only one thing for me to do – to give you your congé."

"Very well put," observed Mataseis, twirling his moustache, with a courteous smile.

"You are free, then. Tyro will pay you the sum I owe you. Are you satisfied?"

"We could not be more so," they both answered at once.

"I am glad that we leave one another good friends. But permit me to ask you one question. Have you ever had anything to complain of since you have been in my service?"

"Never!" they cried, tragically placing their hands on the place where there ought to have been a heart.

"Then perhaps, it is the smallness of the sum that I allow you which induces you to leave me. If I were to double the money?"

"We should be very sorry to do so, caballero, but we should refuse."

"If I were to triple it?" he pursued, looking them full in the face.

The bandits felt compelled to lower their eyes before the flashing look of the young man.

"We should refuse still, caballero," said they, turning away their heads.

"If I were to quadruple it?" resumed he, in the evident intention of pushing them to their last intrenchments.

They hesitated a moment; their eyes darted a momentary flash of covetousness, and Mataseis, after having exchanged a look with his companion, at last answered, in a voice strangled by the emotion which he vainly strove to suppress:

"It would be detestably annoying, caballero, but we should still refuse."

"Then you have decidedly made up your mind?"

"Perfectly, caballero."

"But you have grave motives, no doubt, for acting thus?"

"Certainly, caballero," answered Mataseis; "your service is very agreeable – you see that we render you full justice – too agreeable indeed, for we have nothing to do!"

"What! Nothing to do?" cried the young man.

"Yes, in our line," replied Sacatripas, making a significant gesture, and placing his hand on the knife placed in his polena.

"And that displeases you?"

"Considerably, señor."

"But if it pleases me that it should be so – since you are paid, notwithstanding, what does it matter to you?"

"Very much, caballero; we are men of action – we are, señor, known caballeros, and we have a reputation to sustain. It is not for nothing that we are called Sacatripas and Mataseis; we are

getting rusty in your service, señor; and, moreover," added he with dignity, "we rob you of your money; that will not do."

"What do you mean – rob me of my money?"

"Certainly, caballero, since you do not employ us."

The young man fixed on the bandits – who this time supported it with erect heads – a look of singular expression, and resumed:

"Very well, I admit the first reason; now for the second."

"Pardon, caballero, this is the second: we have now stopped near the Rio Guachipas, have we not?"

"As to that, you ought to know better than I."

"Yes, it is the Rio Guachipas," said Tyro, who had arrived, and who seated himself near his master.

"Very well," resumed Mataseis, bowing courteously to the Guarani, "we have this morning traversed the Rio Dulce."

"What does that signify?" interrupted Emile.

"Pardon, señor; the Rio Dulce is in the province of Tucumán."

"The Rio Guachipas also," added the Guarani.

"Yes," answered the gaucho, without disconcerting himself, "but you will traverse this evening the Rio Bermejo; the Rio Bermejo is in the llano de Manso, and forms a part of the province of Yapizlaga."

"That is true; but what does that matter?"

"Very much, señor; we do not know where your journey will end, and it may last much longer yet; on the other hand, the Rio Dulce runs to Santiago del Estero, where we were born. We want much to see our native country. Now, as we are

only a short distance from it, we intend to retrace our steps, follow the banks of the river, and return to Santiago as soon as possible, in order to comfort our families," he added, assuming a piteous countenance, "whom so long an absence has considerably disquieted."

Emile and Tyro had much difficulty in not bursting out into a fit of laughter in the face of the gauchos, at this singular remark.

"Very well," at last said the painter; "you can leave when you like; you are free."

The gauchos were profuse in thanks, made their most gracious bows, and prepared to withdraw. They had already gone some paces when Tyro recalled them.

"Eh! Señores," he cried.

And they came back.

"Come, you have an account to render before you go."

"Just so, señor."

"And you were going like that, without taking what is due to you!" pursued the Guarani, in a sarcastic tone, which had considerable effect on the gauchos, who, in their desire to go away as quickly as possible, had completely forgotten the money; "That is very gracious on your part."

"I beg you to excuse me, señor," answered Mataseis, with self-possession; "we intended to claim the miserable money before leaving you."

"Eight ounces (£17) – you call that a miserable sum; it is, however, not to be disdained."

"We by no means disdain it, believe me."

Tyro took out eight ounces of gold from a leather purse which he always carried, and presented them to Sacatripas.

The gaucho's eye brightened suddenly at the sight of the gold, and he quickly held out his hand to take it; but Tyro withdrew his hand, and appearing to remember something:

"By the way," said he, "you doubtless remember all the conditions of your agreement?"

"All," answered the gaucho, with his eye fixed on the pieces of gold that Tyro amused himself by chinking in his hand.

"Good; you know that you cannot undertake anything against Señor Don Emile or his friends during the month which follows the termination of your agreement with him?"

"Eh!" said the bandits, starting as if they had been stung by a serpent.

"Yes, so it is written," answered Tyro carelessly.

"Pardon!" sentimentally observed Sacatripas; "But I think that this clause adds that we shall be free of that engagement on the condition of not accepting at our departure the last month's salary."

"Ah! I see that you remember this clause well," cried Tyro, laughing, and making the gold glitter more than ever in the eyes of the gauchos; "so, make your decision, my masters – accept or refuse."

"We refuse," said Mataseis.

"You refuse what?"

"To receive our salary," answered with effort the two men, whose tongues appeared to stick to the roof of their mouths, so much difficulty had they in saying these few words.

"Good, that is agreed," said Tyro, putting the gold in his leather purse, and the purse in his pocket; "a word to the wise! We will be on our guard."

"Oh. I do not fear them," said Emile shrugging his shoulders with scorn.

"¡Caray! Nor I either," said the Guarani. "However, it is good to know how to act."

"Señor," said Mataseis, wrapping himself with dignity in the folds of his poncho, "we have neither hatred nor friendship for you. You are indifferent to us. We do not cherish any project to your prejudice, but we wish to remain free. Liberty is better than gold."

And after this bit of buffoonery, the two gauchos bowed, as Scaramouche would have done, and withdrew apparently quite satisfied with themselves.

Emile followed them with a look for a short time, and then turning towards Tyro:

"No matter, my friend," said he laughing, "it must be confessed that those two fellows are very well matched, physically and morally."

"Yes, they are a pretty pair."

"I expect we shall soon hear something more of them."

"Probably," answered the Guarani, becoming thoughtful. "I

will watch them."

"You are right; as to me, I shall worry myself no more about them. Well, good night. I shall go and regain the time they have caused me to lose. I am very sleepy. What a capital invention is that siesta!"

The young man stretched himself on the grass, closed his eyes, and in five minutes he was sound asleep.

Tyro, after a few moments reflection, left him to his repose.

CHAPTER XV

THE GAUCHOS

The gauchos, like knowing men, aware that it would not be long before they wanted their horses, were careful not to unsaddle them. They had contented themselves with removing the bridle to enable them to feed on the fresh and short grass of the bank, and, for fear of accident, they had attached them by lassos to the trunks of trees.

After the interview which we have related, they returned quickly to find their horses, apparently being in great haste to get away.

But at the moment of putting his foot in the stirrup, Mataseis, whom, as the reader has observed, was the cleverer of the two, stopped suddenly, and turning towards his friend, already in the saddle:

"Eh, companion," said he, "what are you doing?"

"I am going off, you see," answered the other in a sulky air.

"You are going off like that?"

"Why, how do you wish that I should go off?"

"¡Caray! Like a true caballero as you are, by taking leave honestly of our travelling companions."

"To the devil with such folly," said the other, spurring his horse.

But Mataseis boldly seized the horse by the curb, and arrested him in his course.

"It is not folly, my dear fellow," said he; "no one would be less inclined to do that than I; but serious matters are in question."

"Serious matters!" said Sacatripas, with astonishment.

"Caray, I believe you. Ah, where do you come from, my dear fellow? Have you forgotten that we are almost prisoners of the Moros. Ought we not to inform them of our departure? I by no means wish that some thirty of these demons should be at our heels with those interminable lances."

"¡Rayo de Dios! Companion; I have no more wish for that than you, believe me. The mere thought of it chills my blood."

"Bah! reassure yourself; things will go better than you think for. I am convinced that these honest countrymen will be delighted at seeing us go away."

"Let us hope so, companion, let us hope so. I confess that if they wish to get rid of us, there is between them and myself an extraordinary sympathy, for I heartily hope never to see them again."

"Good, you admit the justice of my argument, then."

"Yes, I admit it – I proclaim it!" he cried, with enthusiasm.

"If that is the case, as we ought to lose as little time as possible, get down from your horse and follow me."

"Where are we going?" asked Sacatripas, immediately alighting.

"To the chiefs. Is it not to them that we ought to address

ourselves?"

The Guaycurus captains were sitting a little apart, in the shade of a cluster of forest trees which completely sheltered them from the heat of the sun. Instead of imitating the example of their warriors by sleeping, they were conversing, apparently on important matters, as their dignified gestures and their serious mode of talking would have led an observer to believe.

Notwithstanding the large share of effrontery with which they were by nature endowed, it was nevertheless with timidity that the gauchos approached the warriors, before whom they stopped, after having humbly bowed to them.

Arnal turned towards them, and after having with cool contempt eyed them from head to foot for a minute or two:

"What do you want?" he asked in Spanish.

"Honourable captain," answered Mataseis, making a bow which resembled a genuflection, "my brother and I have the ambitious desire to obtain the kind consideration of your lordship, so that – that – "

And the poor devil stopped short in this intricate sentence, from which he did not know how to escape, upset by the stem and disdainful look of the chief.

"Come to the point – what do you want? Explain yourself briefly," said the chief.

"We wish to leave," resumed Mataseis, boldly taking courage.

"What, to leave? Are you, then, in such a hurry? Wait till we give the order to resume the march."

"Your lordship does not do me the honour to understand me," humbly answered Mataseis, more at his ease. "We wish to separate ourselves from your honourable troop, in order to attend to our personal affairs."

"Ah!" said the chief in a sharp tone, and darting at him a searching look; "If it is so, your master very little understands courtesy if he sends you in his place. Or perhaps he thinks us beneath him?"

"Your lordship still does not understand me," pursued the gaucho, with ill-concealed spite; "my master is entirely ignorant of our application. He has no intention of leaving you."

"Well, then, if that is the case, what do you mean by your application?" cried the chief, whose countenance became immediately calm at this news. "Go to sleep, and do not bother me anymore." Then, turning towards his mute companions, he said scornfully, "These whites, when they have tasted firewater, lose their reason."

"Your honourable lordship errs," replied the gaucho, without concerning himself with the leave which had been so unceremoniously given him. "I have not drunk firewater; nor has my companion. My master has sent us away from his service," added he, slightly altering the truth; "we therefore ask your permission to leave the camp, and to go where we think proper."

"Aha!" cried Arnal, with a disdainful smile, "Is that it?"

"Nothing else, honourable cap – "

"Go, go; be off as quick as possible," cried the chief,

interrupting him; "the sooner we are rid of you, the better we shall like it."

And stopping with a peremptory gesture the pompous expressions of gratitude, and the obsequious salutations which they thought themselves obliged to make, the chief dismissed them, and immediately resumed his conversation with the captains, as though he had not been interrupted by this incident.

The gauchos did not wait for a repetition of the invitation which they had had; they prepared immediately to profit by the permission given them, and took themselves off at a smart gallop in the direction of the Rio Dulce.

During half an hour, or thereabouts, they proceeded quickly without exchanging a word; then, when they had completely disappeared in the windings of the path, and they were quite certain that the tall grass effectually concealed them, they slackened by degrees the pace of their horses, and soon entered some thick shrubbery.

After having alighted, unsaddled their horses, and having assured themselves by a minute search that they had nothing to fear from the ears of any spy, they stretched themselves on the grass, and, free from all care, lit their puros, which they began to smoke with great gusto.

"Ah! My dear fellow!" said Mataseis, sending a long column of bluish smoke, which escaped at the same time from his nose and mouth, "What brutes these Pagans are! Upon my word they are idiots. But what could one do? I was obliged to make

concessions."

"And you have done very well, brother," answered Sacatripas; "the principal thing for us was to escape from the trap in which we were."

"Your approbation is very sensible, my dear fellow; it is sweet to be understood."

"But tell me; now that we are alone, and quite certain not to be heard, we can speak with freedom."

"Between ourselves, we never speak otherwise."

"That is true. Nature has created us brothers."

"Well said, Sacatripas; you have summed up in a few words the bonds that unite us."

"Thank you," answered Sacatripas; "now candidly, I am afraid you have committed an error."

"Oho! And how's that, if you please?"

"Why, it is that I do not at all know this country."

"Because memory fails you."

"Possibly; but I should not be sorry to be quite certain."

"That is easy; listen to me. We crossed this morning the Rio Dulce, did we not? At the ford on this side of the river we passed near a thicket of Holm oaks."

"Let me see, I do not very well remember. There was a wood that we traversed, the trees of which, about the height of a man, were vertically notched."

"Ah, upon my word, it was so. Well?"

"Well, behind this wood was some very thick shrubbery, that

we also crossed."

"We were told to be in a thicket in the midst of which there is a larch tree."

"Very good. Look carefully round you; we are in the thicket, and there is the larch tree behind us."

"Upon my word, I confess that I had not remarked it. On the first branch of the tree there ought to be a cross."

"Look, my dear fellow, look," answered Mataseis.

"¡Caray! I will have the matter cleared up," cried Sacatripas, rising and going towards the tree.

In a minute he returned.

"Honour to you!" he said; "You follow a track like a Pampas Indian; the cross is there."

"Did I not tell you so?" answered Mataseis.

"It is true," humbly answered the other, "but I did not like to believe you."

There was a pause of a few minutes, during which the two gauchos yawned, so as almost to put their jaws out of joint.

"When is he to come?" asked Sacatripas.

"He will be certainly here at sunset."

Sacatripas raised his eyes, stifling a new yawn.

"Hum!" murmured he; "It is scarcely two in the afternoon; we have still three hours to wait; it is very long."

"You are getting weary," said his companion.

"I confess it to my shame – I am horribly tired," said he, lighting another puro.

"Time hangs heavily when there is nothing to do," sentimentously remarked Mataseis.

"That is true," gaped Sacatripas, lighting his cigar.

"Ah! I have it! What do you say to a game?" said Mataseis.

"Good!" exclaimed Sacatripas; "Why should we not have a hand?"

"Let us do so," they cried, brightening up, and each taking an old pack of cards from their pockets, at the same time drawing their knives from their girdles.

These two movements had been executed with such precision and so simultaneously, that they showed that, notwithstanding the great friendship of which they made a parade, the two brothers had not an unlimited confidence in each other's honesty.

"What shall we play for, my dear fellow?" carelessly asked Mataseis shuffling the cards.

"We must play for something."

"Certainly; without that, there would be no pleasure."

"Well put – if we played only for honour."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Sacatripas; "Between us, my dear fellow, honour does not signify much."

"What do you mean?" cried Mataseis.

"I mean," pursued Sacatripas, "that we are both too accomplished and too justly renowned caballeros to risk our honour on a card."

"¡Caray! That is well thought, and delicately said. I entirely share your opinion, my friend."

"It seems to me that the stake is easy to find. For some time we have received a few ounces without having met with any opportunity to spend it."

"Very well, we will play for an ounce."

The two pieces of gold were placed on the grass. They drew lots who should deal. Fate favoured Mataseis, and the game commenced.

Monte is the American lansquenet. Its combinations are the same, or nearly so, as those of lansquenet; only as more cards are on the table, the chances of the banker are greater. The chief art in the game is – as in all games of chance, for that matter – to adroitly shuffle and deal the cards, talents which the Spanish-Americans possess in an eminent degree. They could easily teach the Greeks, the cleverest people in Europe, who are very skilful in the matter.

The game that the two brothers were playing was all the more curious, inasmuch as each one knew thoroughly the resources that his adversary possessed, and his manner of playing.

Two hours passed, during which they did no harm, which the reader can easily understand; the two friends watched each other too narrowly.

During all this time, there had been very little conversation. The only words that they pronounced were in connection with the game, and they confined themselves to the announcement of the colours – words like these, for example, and very little understood by a third party – bastos, palos, copas, oro,

sometimes adding the same before the colour – siete de copas, cinco de palos, &c. However, as often happens, Mataseis, who, in playing fairly, saw fortune favouring him, wished to force the luck, and oblige her to remain faithful to him. The mode was easy for him, and perfectly within his reach; let us do him the justice to acknowledge that he hesitated a long time to employ it – not that his conscience revolted the least in the world against the expedient, which appeared all fair to him – but simply that he was afraid he would be discovered by his companion.

The strife was long; it lasted at least five minutes, but there were four ounces on the game – a pretty sum. There wanted only a dos de oro to win the game. Mataseis balanced the card between his fingers; he was ready to turn it – when he suddenly stopped, leant forward and listened.

"Did you not hear something, my dear fellow?" said he.

His companion turned his head a little.

"No, nothing," said he.

The movement which he had made, rapid as it had been, was enough; the stroke was played, a magnificent dos de oro, carelessly thrown by Mataseis, stood out boldly by the side of the other.

"I have lost again," piteously said Sacatripas, drawing another ounce from his pocket.

"Will you go on?" asked Mataseis, removing the stakes.

This was too much; it awakened the half-dormant suspicions of Sacatripas.

"Yes," replied he; "why not?"

"Why, because you are not in luck, and I should not like to occasion you too serious losses, my dear friend."

"I thank you, but don't concern yourself about that, I beg; luck will return to me, I hope."

"Very well; how much shall we play for this time?"

"Four ounce," boldly said Sacatripas.

"Hum! That is a good deal; mind you are not stumped out."

"Bah! Nothing venture, nothing win. Come, there are my four ounces."

"There are mine!"

Mataseis won again, but this time fairly; fortune favoured him. Sacatripas bit his lips till the blood came, but he did not appear to notice it. He prided himself on being a good player. Coolly drawing his money from his pocket, and piling it before him:

"Ten ounces," said he.

"Oh! oh!" cried Mataseis; "That is a good deal, but I must add two ounces, for there are but eight on the game."

"That is true; well, add them."

"It is a good deal," resumed he.

"Are you afraid?"

"I afraid!" cried Mataseis, wounded in his self-love, and whose covetousness was still more excited by the gold spread out before him; "come on then; you are joking;" and he added the two ounces which were wanting.

The game became enthralling; there were twenty ounces

staked on it.

"La codicia rompe el saco," says a Spanish proverb, which may be translated: Avarice breaks the purse. The sight of the pieces of gold which glittered before his eyes made Mataseis forget all prudence: he had but one thought – to secure, no matter by what means, the sum placed like a bait before him.

After a moment or two of hesitation, he seized the cards with a feverish hand, and commenced the game.

Sacatripas, instead of taking a third puro, carelessly made a cigarette. Apparently indifferent, he followed with a sullen eye all the movements of his adversary.

Several cards had been turned, without the ocho de bastos, which would decide the game in favour of Mataseis, appearing. The more the game advanced, the more the anxiety of the gaucho increased.

Sacatripas laughed gently; he made pleasant jokes on the delay of the appearance of the tres de copas, which would win the game for him.

The question was between the ocho de bastos and the tres de copas. If one turned up first, Mataseis would win; if the other, he would lose. Suddenly, the gaucho turned pale; he saw, on drawing the card that he was about to turn, that it was the tres de copas – that is to say, that he should lose; a cold sweat burst upon his countenance: his hand trembled.

Sacatripas did not flinch; he also had seen the card. We have said that for these two knowing men the back of the cards

virtually did not exist.

"Well," said he, after a pause, "do not you turn it, companion?"

"Yes, yes," answered Mataseis, in a choking voice; then suddenly starting like a wounded buck, "this time, I am sure," cried he excitedly, "we are watched."

With a movement rapid as thought, Sacatripas had with one hand picked up the stakes, and with the other seized and turned one of the cards, at the very moment when Mataseis tried to slip it under the pack.

"This time, companion," said he, in a sharp and biting tone, "I catch you; you are robbing me."

"I rob you!" cried the other in a thundering voice, "I, a caballero – you dare to accuse me of such infamy! You tell a lie, miserable pícaro! It is you who are a thief."

Mataseis had but one resource – that was to get into a rage, and he did so. For that matter, he had ample reasons. He had been caught with his hand in the bag, in the very act of theft, and then – and this made him especially furious – he had lost twenty ounces; for he knew his brother too well to suppose that he would ever consent to give him back the stakes on which he had seized.

"Upon my word," said Sacatripas, with irony, "the game becomes wearisome; luck was against me; we should soon not have known what to do. Let us fight a little; that will help us to pass the time."

"Let us fight then," cried Mataseis, seizing his knife, and

placing his poncho half rolled round his left arm for a shield.

"One moment," said Sacatripas, who had imitated all the movements of his brother, and, like him, was ready for a fight; "let us first settle the conditions of duel; we are caballeros."

"Very good, let us settle them," answered Mataseis, taking a step backward.

"Let us first ask ourselves this question – is the quarrel well founded?"

"It is," duly answered Mataseis.

"Be it so, I admit it; it demands blood."

"It shall have it."

"Does it demand that one of us remain on this soil?"

Mataseis hesitated an instant.

"No," he at last replied.

"Very well; we will not fight with the whole blade."

"No, certainly; it appears to me that five inches will be sufficient."

"I think that will be too much," sententiously replied Sacatripas. "We only fight because our honour is attacked, and because we are caballeros; but the rage which just now excites us ought not to make us forget that we are brothers, and that we love one another very much."

"That is true, we love one another very much."

"This is what I propose, then; we will only fight with two inches, and for the first blood. Is that agreeable to you, my dear fellow?"

"I am at your orders; what you have proposed seems to me just, and I accept it."

"Well, if that is the case, let God protect the right."

Each of the adversaries seized his knife, so that the hand was placed just two inches from the point of the blade, preventing the steel from entering further. After having courteously bowed, they placed themselves on their guard, the body leaning forward, the legs apart and slightly bent, the left arm extended to parry, and the right hand, holding the knife, lightly resting on the right thigh.

The fight began.

The two brothers were expert in the management of the knife; they knew every movement, and dealt with extreme rapidity blow upon blow continually dodging one another.

The knife is not a weapon so easy to be managed as might at first be imagined. The Spanish-Americans have made a profound study of it, and none can equal them in the way in which they manage it. The weapon demands great suppleness of body, a wonderful rapidity of movement, and extreme quickness.

Two antagonists can fight a very long time without being wounded, thanks to the poncho – a shield whose wavy folds deaden the blows, and prevent them from reaching the body, completely sheltering the chest.

The two brothers appeared to have completely forgotten the friendship of which they had every now and then so much boasted, such deadly aim did they take, and with such force did

they deal their blows.

All this time, notwithstanding the coolness which he feigned, Mataseis was deeply vexed by the very cause which had led to his taking a weapon in his hand. The shame of having thus been taken in the act of theft further increased his rage, and took from him, by blinding him with the hope of a prompt vengeance, the presence of mind necessary to sustain the fight without disadvantage.

This circumstance had not escaped Sacatripas, who, while pushing his brother to extremity, and threatening him on all sides at once, never laid himself open to a blow, and kept himself always on his guard.

"¡Rayo de Dios!" cried Mataseis, suddenly, making a sudden backward step, "I believe I am caught!"

"I think so too," answered Sacatripas, looking coolly at the point of his knife; "here is blood!"

At that moment a sound of footsteps was heard, and a man appeared in the thicket.

"Ha! Ha!" said he, rubbing his hands joyously; "There is fighting here; do not disturb yourselves, companions; I will be your witness; I should be much annoyed to disturb you in the least."

At the sound of this voice the two men stood back, trembling. "You come too late, Don Pablo!" said Mataseis, with a gracious smile; "We have done."

"Already!" answered Don Pablo Pincheyra – for it was he who

had so suddenly arrived; "That is a pity."

"We were amusing ourselves till you came, señor, merely to keep our hand in," said Sacatripas.

"Hum!" said the partisan; "The amusement is pretty, and quite to my taste. You were doing well, I think. Señor Mataseis has a gash on his cheek, which has a fine effect."

"Oh! A scratch!" replied Mataseis, with a ghastly smile, and, for want of a handkerchief, wiping his face with his poncho; "Better that I should be wounded than my brother, who is so good, and whom I love so much."

"These sentiments honour you as well as your brother," ironically answered Don Pablo; "it is charming, upon my word, to see a family so united as yours; I am quite overcome by it."

"You flatter us, señor," answered Mataseis, who did not know whether to laugh or to cry, but who, in the dilemma, adopted the former alternative.

"Well," said Don Pablo, "as you have now finished – for you have done, have you not? –"

"Quite, señor."

"Very well; then, if you please, Señor Mataseis, you shall wash your face with a little water, and then, as I have not a moment to lose, we will speak a little of our business."

"We are at your orders, caballero."

"I will be back in a minute," said Mataseis, leaving the thicket, and running towards a stream not far distant.

"Ah, you have had a quarrel, then, with your brother, Señor

Sacatripas?" asked Don Pablo.

"I, señor!" cried the gaucho, with a start of affected astonishment; "I quarrel with my brother, my only relation, my only friend – he whom I cherish more than myself! Oh, señor, you cannot believe it!"

Don Pablo looked at him a moment with admiration.

"Come," said he, "you have acted your parts well; you are well matched; do not let us say any more about it; it is quite agreed that you are model brothers."

At this moment Mataseis returned; he had made a poultice of coca leaves, and had placed it on his face, tying it on with a strip torn from a blanket; so that he had an extraordinarily original appearance.

"Let us talk then," said Don Pablo, seating himself on the grass, and making a sign to the gauchos to take their seats near him.

"Let us talk," replied the latter.

CHAPTER XVI

A CONSPIRACY

The sun, which had been nearly on the level of the horizon, soon disappeared; his disc was no longer visible through the branches; the evening breeze in fitful gusts agitated the foliage, and the birds rapidly regained their roost for the night. The atmosphere was sensibly refreshed, and though light remained on the plain, the thickets and shrubbery were already shadowed by twilight. The mosquitoes buzzed by myriads over the ponds and lakes, the greenish and stagnant water of which was agitated by the movements of the reptiles. Already some dull growls had troubled the silence of the desert, announcing the awakening of the animals, saluting, on emerging from their secret lairs, the setting of the sun.

The three men were sitting in the underwood, which began to be shrouded in darkness. The Pincheyra had gone to seek his horse, which had been left near those of the gauchos, to feed on the fresh grass and the young roots of trees.

"Shall we light a fire?" asked Mataseis.

"What for?" asked Don Pablo.

"Why, first to see clearly, and then to warm ourselves."

"To say nothing of the glare of the fire keeping off the wild beasts," added Sacatripas.

"And attracting the red and white spies who are roaming about," said the partisan with irony. "Are you afraid?"

"Afraid – of what?" said Mataseis.

"I do not know – of your shadow, perhaps?"

"Never – neither my brother nor I – we have no fear," said the gaucho, in a harsh voice.

"Ah; not even that of rapping your knuckles in striking flint and steel," pursued the Pincheyra in a tone of sarcasm; "then I offer you my compliments, caballeros; for I have many a time had that fear myself."

The gauchos understood the raillery, and frowned.

"Is it to babble like drivelling old women, or to talk on serious matters, like true men, that we are here?" asked Mataseis in a sulky tone.

"That is good, señor caballero!" cried Don Pablo laughing. "¡Vive Dios! How you take fire at an innocent joke!"

"I don't call that joking," said the gaucho drily.

"Come, calm yourself, valiant caballero; I shall be henceforth serious as an Indian chief, as you wish it; well then, I think it will be best not to light a fire."

"Then, do not light it – it is quite indifferent to me; but though the conversation may be a short one, we shall be benumbed with cold by the time it is over."

"I do not say no, but prudence demands that we take the greatest precautions. We are not here on an open hill, where the eye, ranging without hindrance on either side, enables the

approach of an enemy to be seen by the simple undulation of the grass. We are, on the contrary, crouched like wolves in the underwood, enveloped on all sides by walls of foliage. Remember the axiom of the desert, the justice of which has many a time been shown: 'In the forest, trees have ears, and leaves have eyes;' how can we know that spies are not roaming about in the shadows? The light of a cigar would be enough to attract them; the matters of which we have to converse are too grave for us to run the risk, when we can avoid it, of being surprised and overheard."

"You are right; I will not argue any more. Now I beg you come to the point without more delay."

"Are you free?"

"Free as birds; free as air."

"You have broken your engagement with Don Emile?"

"This very morning."

"If that is the case, I can understand your game with the knife."

"With all respect to you, señor, you do not understand it at all."

"Bah! Don Emile, in dismissing you, has given each of you a pretty good sum. Naturally, you have played while waiting for me, and thence the wound on the cheek."

"Well, señor, you are not at all right: although there is some truth in what you say, you have nevertheless made a serious mistake, which it is my duty to correct."

"Well, let us have it. I am all ears."

"Well, Don Emile has certainly dismissed us; he offered each

of us four ounces, which he owed us for a month's salary."

"Of course you accepted it?"

"That is where you are wrong, señor. We refused it."

"You refused it? Oho! That tale is rather too good for me, gentlemen."

"It is, nevertheless, strictly true."

"Well, you doubtless had a motive for so acting?"

"Yes; this was it. On receiving Don Emile's money we engaged on our honour, according to the treaty we had with him, not to endeavour to do him any injury for the course of a month."

"¡Caspita! That is certainly serious. And you had the courage to refuse?"

"Not to betray our consciences, and to preserve our liberty of action, yes, señor!"

"We are caballeros," added Sacatripas, "and you know, señor, for a caballero, honour is everything."

"¡Caspita! I know it," cried Don Pablo, bowing with an ironical smile, which, thanks to the increasing darkness, passed unperceived by the gaucho. "Do you know, caballeros, the more I reflect, the more I think your action was magnificent."

"We have only done our duty," modestly answered Mataseis.

"That is true; but how many others in your position would have pocketed the ounces!"

The two fellows were delighted at these mocking compliments, which they took, or rather pretended to take – for they were not fools – like so much ready money.

"Every good action merits reward," continued the Pincheyra, "and sooner or later that reward comes. You shall now have a proof of it," added he, taking out a little bag made of Spanish wool, the rotundity of which was pleasant to see, from under his poncho; "you have given proof of a disinterestedness and a loyalty which show me that you really are caballeros. You have refused four ounces; well, I shall be pleased to give you ten."

"Oh, caballero," cried the bandits.

"I know what you are going to say to me," pursued Don Pablo; "you were going to assert that every good action carries in itself its own reward."

"Yes, señor; you have guessed what we mean," cried Mataseis, with enthusiasm. This, however, was not at all what he thought.

"But I do not agree with that," continued Don Pablo, "I should like you thoroughly to understand that I know how to appreciate an action like yours."

He then opened the bag without appearing to notice that the bandits gloated on it, delicately introduced his long and slender fingers into its mouth, and took out just the sum promised.

"There, my braves," said he, sharing the sum between them, and at the same moment pocketing his purse; "there is your money."

The gauchos held out their hands, seized the money, and put it into their large pockets with a thrill of pleasure, mixed, however, with a little bitterness at the thought that it would have been easy, and much more profitable, to take the eight ounces from Don

Emile; but people cannot think of everything. They found out their want of cleverness too late.

"Now let us return to business," coolly said Don Pablo, unceremoniously stopping the speech of the gauchos, who seemed to consider themselves bound to offer exaggerated specimens of gratitude; "have you quite decided to serve me?"

"We have," answered Mataseis, in his own name and that of his brother.

"Here is the matter, then; for motives, which I need not tell you, I wish to seize two persons who, having set out a few days since, are to meet, in company with several others, at about twenty leagues from the spot where we are, the rendezvous having been arranged beforehand."

"Good! That can be done!"

"But it is more difficult than you suppose. Unhappily, it is impossible for me to employ the men of my own squadron; they are too well known, and the secret would immediately transpire."

"Who are these two persons?"

"The first is a Frenchman."

"Don Emile!" cried the gaucho.

"You have not guessed it; on the contrary, I believe that this Frenchman is the mortal enemy of Don Emile."

"So much the better!" answered Mataseis with affectation; "I should have been much annoyed at being his enemy."

"He is such a good young man!" said Sacatripas, like an echo. The Pincheyra smiled.

"This Frenchman is named, I believe, Dubois, or something of that sort."

"Yes, yes; we know him. He arrived in this country, where he now enjoys considerable influence with the government, only, a few months ago. He came from Chili, if my memory does not deceive me."

"It is just this man with whom we have to do. Do you think you will find any difficulty in seizing him?"

"Not the least. Now for the other."

"The other is General Don Eusebio Moratín."

"Who is about to be chosen president of the republic?"

"The same."

"Hum! It is a serious matter."

"Very serious – I have already warned you of that."

"General Moratín is a good patriot – a man of some consideration, and much liked – he is one of the pillars of the revolution."

"It is just for that reason that I wish to get him out of the way," said Don Pablo, impatiently.

"To get rid of him. Do you wish to kill him, then?"

"To kill him, or take him – it matters little, so that he disappears how the affair is managed."

"And the other?"

"The question is the same for both."

"The devil!" murmured the gaucho, scratching his head furiously apparently to find a solution.

"That will be very costly, will it not?"

"Two good patriots!" continued Mataseis, without appearing to have heard Don Pablo's remarks; "We also are patriots; we have gloriously shed our blood for liberty."

"It will cost a great deal, as far as I can see."

"Oh, my dear country!" cried Sacatripas, raising his hands and his eyes to Heaven with mock enthusiasm.

Don Pablo stamped with rage. He knew very well how to take the patriotic sentiments of the two fellows; and although he himself was not a man of much delicacy in such matters and in many others, this ridiculous squeamishness disgusted him. However, it was necessary for him to conceal his disgust, for he had now advanced too far to retreat.

"Oh!" cried Mataseis, "Such a proposition – to us!"

"To caballeros!" exclaimed Sacatripas, covering his face.

"So you refuse?" coldly said the Pincheyra, making a movement to rise.

"We do not say that!" quickly cried Mataseis, retaining him by the poncho.

"We never said that," echoed Sacatripas.

"Only at the thought of committing this action, our heart bleeds."

"We must, however, decide," pursued Don Pablo; "however agreeable your company may be, I cannot remain all night with you. I thought you were intelligent men, free from prejudices; that is why I chose you for this business. If it is not agreeable to

you to serve me, consider that I have said nothing about it. I will propose it to others less scrupulous, who will be charmed at thus earning a hundred ounces, which is a pretty sum."

"What was it you said, señor?" sharply cried Mataseis.

"I said a hundred ounces," coolly answered Don Pablo; "as times go, gentlemen, you ought to look twice at that before refusing 1700 piastres (£212). Money becomes more and more scarce, and if the revolution only lasts two years more, we shall not be able to get any at all."

"True, señor; we live in very unfortunate times."

"Yes, yes, very unfortunate," added Sacatripas, in tears.

"Come, decide; is it yes or no," said Don Pablo, in a peremptory tone. "I will add, by-the-bye, if that will calm your honourable scruples, that these two men, with regard to whom you are so tender, are only going to the rendezvous of which I have spoken with the design of betraying what you call your republic."

"Oh, oh! Are you quite certain of what you say, señor?" asked Sacatripas, breathing like a man on the point of drowning, and who suddenly raised his head above the water.

"There is nothing more certain; besides, as you will probably be present at the interview they are to have with the Brazilian general – "

"What! Are they thinking of treating with the Brazilians?"

"They simply wish to sell their country to Brazil."

"Ah, look at that, my dear fellow," exclaimed Sacatripas;

"that, it seems to me, considerably alters the matter."

"Changes it completely," answered the latter.

"We shall do the work of good patriots by arresting a traitor."

"By frustrating a horrible plot," exclaimed Sacatripas, with a gesture of horror.

"And you gain one hundred ounces, which cannot do you any harm."

"And we gain one hundred," cried Mataseis, eagerly; but suddenly stopping and biting his lips, "Oh! Believe us, señor," said he, with compunction, "that the love of our country alone animates us in this matter. We have no other interest than this – to save our country from the abyss into which traitors wish to hurl it."

"No other than that," added Sacatripas, who made a point of modelling all he said on that of his brother.

"That is agreed," said Don Pablo, bowing; "so it is now agreed – you accept?"

"We accept; we must serve our country whenever occasion offers, but we want some instructions."

"I am ready to give you all you require."

"First; how are we to proceed?"

"As to that, that is your affair. I leave the choice of means entirely to you; the result alone concerns me. You are very intelligent caballeros, endowed with a very fertile imagination; quite accustomed to this sort of affair, in which you have acquired great experience. I do not doubt that, if you will give

yourself the trouble, you will come out of the affair with honour."

"You flatter us, señor; but the business seems to us a thorny one."

"Very thorny," said Sacatripas, shaking his head.

"Bah! It requires a little skill, that is all. You are known for good patriots. In the escort, you will probably meet friends, or, at least, acquaintances; no difficulty will be made in receiving you, and when the occasion presents itself, well – you will seize it!"

"That's it – we will seize it. Is it important to kill them?"

"Upon my word – that is your business. Provided that you give me an undeniable proof that you have accomplished your mission, I shall not require anything else. You will see, you will reflect. Prisoners are often very embarrassing in the desert when you have not enough men to guard them, so that they cannot attempt to escape. But you will do as you shall think best."

"That is to say, that we have *carte blanche*?"

"Just so."

"Good! It is well to understand one another, in order that we may not commit errors which will have to be much regretted. Where do you think we shall meet our two personages."

"As to that, you cannot make a mistake. They come from Tucumán, and will, of course, take the bank of the Rio Dulce, as there is no other practicable path."

"Have they already set out?"

"I will not be certain, but I think so."

"Very well; we will join them. That will be neither long nor

difficult, as we have only to retrace our steps – which we are going to do this very evening – for we by no means care to pass the night in the place in which we are."

"Well put, my master."

"When our mission shall be terminated, we shall probably have to give you an account of it, if it is only – "

"To take your money," interrupted Don Pablo.

"It is not that that I wished to say," quickly replied Mataseis, whose concealed thought, however, it was – for he was not sorry to see the prospect of the promised reward. "If it be only, I was saying, to give you an account of what has happened – to give you up the prisoners, if we have them – or, at least, to give you the proofs that you wish of their arrest."

"Just so; we must see each other again. Oh! That will be very easy; why cannot you go as far as Casa-Frama?"

The gauchos made a grimace. This proposition by no means pleased them; it was putting themselves under the paws of the lion.

"It is very far," observed Mataseis. "The roads are very bad; the journey would occasion us an irreparable loss of time."

"Yes, and then," said the Pincheyra, smiling, "great as is the confidence you have in me, it does not go so far as to induce you to place yourself entirely at my mercy. I understand your hesitation."

"Oh, señor I do not think – "

"I do not think anything, and you give me no offence, I assure

you. In this world it is good to be prudent, and so far you are right. To come to Casa-Frama would necessitate your making a journey which, in the event of your bringing the prisoners with you, would be very troublesome. This rendezvous would be worth nothing. I prefer to give you another."

"Whatever it is, caballero, we accept it with the greatest pleasure."

"I am sure of it. You, of course, know the town of Cordova?"

"On the Rio Primero – yes, señor."

"It is not far from the Rio Dulce?"

"About twenty leagues at the most."

"That's it. Well, at about two leagues from Cordova, coming from the Rio Dulce, there is a tambo."

"The tambo del Almendral – we know it well; there are two magnificent almond trees before the door."

"That's it. Well, your expedition terminated, proceed directly to this tambo. I will wait for you."

"We shall take care not to fail, caballero."

"I wish, before leaving you, to give you a proof of the confidence which I have in you."

"A confidence which shall be justified, do not doubt it, señor."

"I have promised you one hundred ounces each, have I not?"

"Yes, señor, one hundred ounces each," said the bandits, whose eyes flashed with covetousness.

Don Pablo again took from under his poncho the Spanish wool purse, and took from it a certain number of pieces of gold.

"Here are twenty-five ounces each," said he, presenting them, "which I beg you to accept as an earnest of our bargain."

"Oh, señor!" they cried, pocketing the money joyfully; "There is no necessity for that."

"I know you too well not to be assured of your complete disinterestedness," he answered; "but we do not know what may happen. Perhaps you will have expenses to incur, so that you had better have funds. Now, gentlemen, we have not, I think, anything more to say. I shall have the honour, then, of taking leave of you, for I have far to go before I get any repose for the night."

"We, too, are going to set out, señor, and if you are going our way, we shall be happy to have your company as far as possible."

"Whatever direction you take," answered he, frowning, "that which I take is diametrically opposite to it."

"That is enough, señor," answered Mataseis, in an offended tone.

"Do not misunderstand my words," resumed Don Pablo, who saw his mistake; "the success of the affair in which we are engaged demands that no one should know of the relations which exist between us. Otherwise, I should be delighted and honoured by taking advantage, for a longer time, of your agreeable company."

The gauchos bowed deferentially. Matters being thus arranged on a good footing, Don Pablo hastened to saddle his horse, and immediately leaped on his back.

"Adieu, señores," said he, bowing slightly to them. "Before separating, permit me to say a last word."

"Speak, señor."

"Well, if I am satisfied with the way in which you shall accomplish your mission, bear this in mind – the twenty-five ounces that I have given you shall not be taken from the sum I have promised you – you understand? Au revoir."

And spurring his horse, he emerged from the thicket, leaving the gauchos there, in a state of jubilation impossible to describe.

"Eh! Eh!" cried Mataseis, rubbing his hands; "this day's work has not been bad – what do you say, my dear fellow?"

"I think it is capital," answered Sacatripas.

"Yes, yes," said the other, with some remains of rancour, "because you have done me out of ten ounces."

"Do not let us speak anymore of that; the affair has been settled."

"Yes, on my face, by an ugly scratch."

"Do you complain of that? It is so skilfully made, that you look like a guapo (bravo) of Santiago."

"I do not complain of it, but it smarts very much."

"Bah! Tomorrow you will think nothing of it."

"I hope so, indeed. Shall we go? It is already late."

"Nearly half past six; how the time passes in talking!"

"Yes, and in reckoning money," said Mataseis, laughing.

"Well, let us go then; we shall have the advantage of moonlight some part of the way, which will be all the better, as our horses

are tired."

They then saddled their horses.

"I did not think Don Pablo Pincheyra was so generous," said Sacatripas, while placing the harness on his horse.

"Nor I either; he has been represented to me as an avaricious man."

"The death of these two men must be a matter of great importance to him."

"That is just what I think. By-the-bye, shall we kill them or not?"

"What should we do with them? They would embarrass us."

"Bah! Let us kill them; in that way we should not fear their escaping."

"That is the surest way; an affair like this ought not to be done by halves."

"Well, we will decide on that – we will kill them."

"We will kill them."

After having thus come to an agreement, the two bandits lighted their cigars, mounted on horseback, and took the road which would take them out of the wood, where this dark plot had just been conducted.

CHAPTER XVII

ARNAL

Several days had passed since that on which the two gauchos, after leaving the service of the young painter, had gone to ensconce themselves in the thicket, whither a sinister appointment called them. The Guaycurus had continued their journey with that extraordinary rapidity which is a characteristic of the Indians.

We now find them camped in an immense plain, concealed in the midst of an immense forest, the trees of which – a century old – form round them walls of verdure, through which it is impossible for the eye to pierce.

This plain – an advanced post, as it were, of the great chaco, that trackless desert which is the unexplored refuge of the Indian bravos who flee from civilisation – forms a part of the llano de Manso, in the fictitious province of Yapizlaga. We say fictitious, and intentionally; for since its discovery, if the Europeans have succeeded in giving a name to this part of the American territory, they have certainly never succeeded in building towns there, though they have established missions.

This territory is really the sacred soil of the aboriginal Americans; they alone inhabit it, and traverse it in every direction. Even at the present day the whites only find in this

immense valley a miserable death, after horrible sufferings, and their whitened bones, – scattered in every direction, appear to warn those whom a mad folly may induce to follow in the same traces, that such is the fate which attends them in this inhospitable region.

But the llano de Manso is not, as might be supposed, a sterile plain like the Pampas of Buenos Aires, or a desolate desert like the Sahara. No country in the world, perhaps, possesses a more luxuriant vegetation, more verdant banks, or forests more woody, or better stocked with game of all sorts. Several rivers, and some of them of considerable importance, wind their sinewy course through the llano (plain) which they fertilise. Of these streams the principal is the Rio Tarifa, an affluent of the Rio Bermejo, which itself is an affluent of the Rio Paraguay, and the Rio Pilcomayo, which, after traversing the llano for its entire length, loses itself in the Rio Paraguay by three embouchures. All these rivers – at first torrents – descend the Cordilleras; their picturesque banks are often inundated to a distance of two or three leagues in the rainy season and then the llano, the low vegetation of which almost entirely disappears under the water, assumes a strange and fantastic appearance.

This immense plain, the natural frontiers of which extend very far from Brazil and the old Spanish colonies, is considered by the greater part of the Indian nations who live in the chaco as a neutral territory where each has the right of trying his fortune – from the hunter's point of view, of course – without anyone

contesting his right.

The principal tribes who traverse this desert, or who have temporary habitations there, are the Lengoas, the Zamercose, the Chiriguanos, the Payagoas, and the Guaycurus, the most renowned of all – those to whom the Portuguese, to distinguish them from the other tribes, have given the characteristic name of Indian *cabalheiros* (cavaliers or gentlemen); not only because their life is passed, so to say, on horseback, but especially on account of their remarkable intelligence, and their manners, which bear testimony to a former civilisation – almost, lest it is true, but which must have been very advanced.

The whites, we repeat, were alone excluded from this sacred territory, where their presence entailed death, with all the refinements invented by Indian imagination.

The war detachment of the Guaycurus – which we have seen at the commencement of this work, set out from the Rincón del Bosquecillo, to fight for the Brazilians in the old Spanish colonies, now completely emancipated – was at last on its return to the territories of its tribe after having traversed enormous distances, penetrated a long way into the Chilian Cordilleras, braved for several months all sorts of perils, and enraged in skirmishes without number.

The joy of the Indians was great; it almost amounted to delirium, for many of them had given up the hope of again seeing those fertile regions where they had been born, and had often shuddered at the thought of dying ingloriously in the midst of the

snows of the Cordilleras.

On the preceding evening they had at last reached the goal towards which their desires had so long tended. The llano had appeared to them in its grandiose majesty, and a cry of delight had burst from breasts so long oppressed by fear. The camp had been established in a vast glade, in the midst of an immense forest, the most mysterious recesses of which were well known to the warriors, who often ventured there in pursuit of wild animals.

As soon as the camp had been installed, and watch fires had been lighted – for the position was so well chosen that it was impossible that the light should be perceived from the plain, so thick was the foliage which surrounded the glade – the Cougar had immediately sent as emissary to Tarou Niom, the first chief of the tribe, who lived in a village about thirty leagues, as the crow flies – a very short distance for the Indians.

The emissary having set off, the captains occupied themselves in obtaining a large supply of dry wood, as producing less smoke, to keep up the fires; and some forty warriors, under the orders of the Gueyma, had started off as a hunting party for two or three days, while the Indians who remained at the camp employed themselves in constructing enramadas, to shelter the warriors, and corals to enclose the horses.

All these labours showed that the detachment, instead of continuing the journey as far as the villages of its tribe, intended to make a pretty long stay in the glade; for, ordinarily, encampments for two or three days do not necessitate any

precautions. All that is thought of is to light fires to roast the meat and to keep off the wild beasts during the night.

This new delay to their return had caused the Indians a somewhat acute disappointment, and much diminished their joy, for nearly all had wives and children that they longed to see; but they were constrained to obey, and we may add that they did this with a good grace, convinced that their chiefs wished as much as themselves to see their homes again, and that if they stopped at the moment when they were just at the end of their journey there were probably grave reasons for acting thus.

It was about two in the afternoon. Thanks to the labours executed under the surveillance of the captains, the glade had assumed the appearance of an Indian village, by reason of the enramadas (huts), supported against each other, forming streets, which all radiated from one common centre, where, in the midst of a kind of place, was raised an enramada, larger and made with more care, intended to serve for the hut of the council.

Here and there Guaycurus went and came, some carrying water, others wood, others again leading horses to water at a neighbouring stream. The Cougar had set out since the morning, with the party who were charged to gather brushwood; the only chief who remained in the camp was Arnal, as Gueyma had gone off at daybreak, at the head of the hunters.

Arnal was at this moment walking in the camp, in company with Dove's Eye. The graceful girl was laughing and leaping near the chief, whose grave bearing and knitted eyebrows manifested

serious thought.

"Look, chief," said the young girl, looking round her with admiration, "how well everything is arranged. If there were women, we might think it was a village."

"Why do you call me chief?" asked the warrior.

"Why, my brother," answered she, ingenuously, "I thought to please you, by giving you the title which belongs to you."

"You are a foolish child, Dove's Eye; your head is empty."

"Yes, but my heart is not," answered she, impulsively.

"What do you mean by that?" said Arnal, with severity.

"Will Gueyma soon return from the chase, my good brother?" pursued the girl, with a calm voice.

"What does that matter?"

"It matters very much to me, brother; Gueyma is a powerful chief; he loves me."

"Who has told you that?" said Arnal, stopping in his walk.

"Himself, this morning, before leaving for the chase," answered she, without being disconcerted; "oh! It is not the first time."

"Gueyma has acted badly in speaking thus to you," severely answered the chief; "and you have acted unwisely in listening to him. Both of you have failed in your promises."

"Pardon me, brother," replied the young girl, her eyes filling with tears.

"Tell me what has passed between you," said the chief, drawing the girl a little on one side.

"I will do so willingly, brother; but I beg you, change this sad look, which frightens me, for if you do not, I shall not have the courage to tell you anything."

"You will really tell me everything?"

"Oh, I promise you, my brother."

"Come, I believe you. Speak, I am listening," said Arnal, whose brow brightened.

"This, then, is what has happened, my brother," resumed the girl, assuming a coaxing tone, and lowering her eyes, slightly blushing. "Three days ago we had stopped sooner than usual, and the camp had been formed on the bank of a river that we were to cross the next day. You remember it, do you not?"

"Yes, I remember it. Go on."

"Gueyma had been designated by yourself to go with some warriors to seek for a ford. The sun was still high in the horizon; the day's journey had not been long, and I was not tired. Obligated to watch the formation of the camp, you had left me alone, and I became very dull. I at first intended to go and talk with the palefaces, who are so good, and towards whom you manifest so many marks of friendship."

"You would have done well to have paid them a visit," interrupted Arnal, with some emotion.

"I did not dare, my brother; I feared to be blamed by you. Then, as you did not return, and as I became more and more dull, the idea seized me to go and gather flowers on the bank of the river; was it bad?"

"No, if you had no afterthought."

"What afterthought?" asked the young girl, ingenuously.

Arnal bit his lips.

"Nothing, nothing; go on," said he.

"I went then to the river; there was a multitude of beautiful flowers – blue, yellow, white, violet, red – and I don't know what else. I jumped with delight, and I began to gather as many flowers as I could carry; then I sat on the bank of the river to form a coronet; and while I was thus occupied, singing this pretty song – you know, brother – "

"A bird in the sky,
With azure wing.
Doth gently fly
To – "

"I know the song, child, for it was with that that you were cradled."

"I was singing it then," resumed the young girl, "when I heard a slight noise near me. I turned; Gueyma was but two paces off, at the foot of a tree. He looked at me; his eyes were wet with tears."

"You do not know what you say, child," briskly interrupted Arnal.

"Oh, I am indeed quite certain of it, for I saw them. I do not know what I suffered, brother; my chest heaved as if it were about to burst; my heart beat violently; I felt that I was very pale, and I remained quite silent. 'Oh, go on, Dove's Eye,' he said to

me, entreatingly; 'sing, sing again.' Then I felt the words coming back to me, and I finished the song. He listened to it without interrupting me; then, when I had finished, he approached me, took my hand, and in a sweet and trembling voice, said: 'You are good, Dove's Eye; thank you for the moment of happiness that you have given me.' I felt my hand tremble in his; I dared not answer, and I remained motionless, my eyes downcast, not knowing how to look at him. 'For whom have you gathered those flowers?' he asked me after a pause. 'For myself,' I answered, confusedly. 'Will you allow me to take one?' he continued, in a voice trembling as my own. 'Oh I take them all!' I cried, giving them to him; and in spite of myself – I don't know how it was – I felt that my heart was full, and I burst into tears. 'Oh! I have given you pain!' cried he, with an accent so piteous that with an effort I smiled through my tears, answering him gently: 'Oh! no, Gueyma – on the contrary.' At these words his countenance suddenly changed and became radiant. You see that I tell you everything, my brother."

"Go on, go on!" cried the latter, with ill-concealed impatience.

"Both of us were silent," resumed the young girl; "we looked at each other without daring to speak, and yet I felt unspeakable happiness in knowing that he was near me. Several times he seemed on the point of speaking to me; his lips half-opened. I listened, but no sound escaped them. At last he leaned towards me, and, in a voice as soft as a sigh, 'I love you, Dove's Eye,' he said to me, 'do you love me?' 'Yes,' murmured I, and this simple

word seemed to give him so much pleasure that I do not regret having allowed it to escape me."

"'Dove's Eye,' he then said to me, 'we are now bound to each other by ties of mutual love that nothing can break on earth or in heaven; will you always love me?' 'Always.' 'Thank you, Dove's Eye,' he resumed, 'I have faith in you; none other but you shall be my wife; I will ask you of your brother; in the moon of the eagles we will be united. Good-bye for the present, Dove's Eye; if your brother asks you, do not conceal anything from him; tell him all that has passed between us. There is nothing wrong; he will understand our love, and will consent to make us happy.' I chose a flower – one only among all those I had presented to him. I took that flower, I impressed a kiss on its half-opened cup, and then I offered it to Gueyma. He took it, lifted it quickly to his lips, pressed my hand again, disappeared behind the shrubbery, and I remained alone. Then I pensively retraced my way to the camp. It seemed as if I had lived an age in a few minutes, and that all was changed around me. There is the narrative that you asked of me, my brother; as Gueyma had recommended me, and as I promised you, I have concealed nothing. Do you blame me for what has happened?"

"Eh! Why should I blame you, poor child!" cried Arnal, with sad emotion; "Can I render you responsible for a fault which is not yours? You have obeyed the instinct of your heart; nature has been stronger than my experience, and has upset all my calculations of happiness for you. I will see Gueyma; I will sound

his intentions; only promise me not to speak to him except before me. The care of your future belongs to me only, and I wish that you may be happy."

"I will obey you, brother, in whatever you ask of me."

"Good, my girl; I rely on your promise; now dry your tears and follow me. We will go and see the whites that you love so much."

"Ah! So much the better!" cried the young girl, suddenly becoming joyous again at this news.

Contrary to the prejudice which the Indians have against the whites, for whom they profess an implacable hatred, the Guaycurus had treated the French painter and the persons who accompanied him with the greatest consideration, considering their guests almost as if they had been their brothers. As to Emile Gagnepain, the cordiality that the Indians manifested towards him increased, and under all circumstances the captains exhibited a marked deference for him. Several times, indeed, they had invited him to take his place with them round the council fire, appearing to attach great importance to his opinion.

Although flattered by these proofs of sympathy, the young man had constantly declined these advances, fearing, if he accepted them, to give rise to jealousy on the part of certain warriors, and thus to create enemies in the detachment when he only desired friends in view of their influence with regard to the two ladies.

This conduct – at once wise and skilful – far from injuring the young man – had only increased the esteem that the Indians, and

especially the captains, had for him. Amongst the latter there was one who appeared to have for him and the two ladies a sincere friendship: it was Arnal.

Every time that he could find an opportunity to withdraw himself from his duties as a chief, either while in camp or on the march, Arnal seized it eagerly to visit – always in company with Dove's Eye – his white friends, as he called them – although his complexion was nearly the same as theirs – and to talk for hours with them.

These thoroughly intimate conversations were full of charms, especially for strangers. Arnal talked well; he had seen much; his experience of life was great. There was, then, a good deal to learn in his company – so much the more as his elevated ideas, and his acquired knowledge, formed a complete contrast to the ignorance of the other Indians.

Strange to say, Arnal had never seemed to notice the disguise of the ladies; he had never made any allusion to the subject, and if he had made the discovery he had carefully concealed it in his own heart.

The artlessness and the native grace of Dove's Eye during these interviews, softened what there was grave and severe in the bearing and the words of her brother. The ladies had taken her into their friendship; they pampered her like a sister, and complacently allowed themselves to be teased by her.

The hours which the brother and sister thus passed with the strangers were the only rays of sunny light which cheered their

sad existence. It was, therefore, with a real sentiment of joy that the latter saw them arrive at their enramada if they were in camp, or range themselves near them if the detachment was on the march.

The day on which we resume our recital, Emile awaited with lively impatience the visit of his friends, and it was with the greatest pleasure that he at last saw them arrive.

The conversation was at first general between the five persons; then, by degrees, the two ladies occupied themselves with Dove's Eye, whom they took to the other extremity of the enramada, so that Emile and Arnal remained, so to say, alone.

"I see that you wish to speak to me," said the chief, smiling, "and I think I can guess what you are going to ask me, Señor Don Emile."

"It is true that I wish to speak with you, chief," answered the young man, rather surprised at this abrupt appeal; "but as to what I wish to say, I doubt – unless you are a magician – whether you can guess."

"You shall be able to judge of that," seriously answered Arnal. "Here is the substance – for I do not pretend to know the exact details – of what you wish to say. We are camped nearly in the middle of the llano de Manso, at some forty leagues from the frontiers of Brazil, where you wish to proceed with your friends. The distance which now separates you from your persecutors is too great for you to fear them any longer; you have a great desire to pass the frontier, and at last to reach the Brazilian territory.

The protection that we have given you from this time becomes needless. Instead of wasting your time by remaining in this forest, which has no great interest for you, you wish to obtain, thanks to my influence, the right of continuing your journey, under the escort of ten or a dozen of our warriors. Is that it, my friend? Have I told you all? Have I forgotten anything? Speak; I am ready to apologise if I am wrong."

Arnal could easily have continued to speak as long again, without fear of being interrupted by his listener; the latter was literally dumbfounded by surprise. What the chief had told him was exact in every particular. In a long conversation with the marchioness and Doña Eva, the Frenchman had agreed to make this request of the captain at their first meeting; but what he could not understand was, how Arnal had been so well informed as to a secret that he thought he and the two ladies alone possessed.

But Arnal did not intend to let the Frenchman off so easily. He for a time enjoyed his triumph, and then resumed in a gentle and insinuating voice:

"Does it annoy you, my friend, to find me so well informed as to your projects? I possess secrets more important still."

"Chief!" at last murmured the young man, blushing and casting a furtive look behind him.

"Reassure yourself, my friend. As these secrets concern you only, and as I have learned them without your authority, I will keep them in my own breast; I will even forget them if you wish it."

"But how does it happen – "

"Friend," interrupted Arnal, with melancholy, "although my life does not number many years, I have learnt many things; but enough of that – let that suffice you."

"Be it so. But one word. Do you favour my projects?"

"No!" answered he, sharply.

"No!" cried the young man, with amazement.

The two ladies had quietly approached. They listened, and grew pale. With a gesture, Arnal ordered the young girl to go away. Dove's Eye immediately obeyed, and withdrew out of the reach of his voice.

"No," Arnal said in a peremptory tone, which chilled his auditors. "I will not favour your projects. On the contrary, I will use all my power, and all the influence that my friendship gives me, to keep you near us, and that in your own interest."

"In our interest?" cried Emile.

"Certainly – in your interest, poor fool!" cried he, with vehemence; "These enemies, whom you suppose so far off, are here – are only a few paces from the spot on which we now are; they have followed on your track since your flight from San Miguel de Tucumán; you have everything to fear – not yourself, Don Emile, but the Marchioness de Castelmelhor and her daughter Doña Eva."

At this terrible revelation the two ladies concealed their faces in their bands, uttering a piercing cry.

"Do you think," continued the chief, vehemently, "that your

disguise has deceived us for a moment?"

"Oh! We are lost!" cried the marchioness.

"Eh, no! you are saved, or at least I hope so; you are our guests. Your enemy himself is powerless to injure you, so long as you remain near us. All his efforts will break against a rock – my immovable will!" said the chief.

"Oh, chief!" cried the marchioness, taking his hand; "It is not for myself that I implore you – it is for my daughter."

"Alas! Chief," said the young girl, "if a victim must be sacrificed, choose me, save – save my mother!"

Notwithstanding his Indian stoicism, Arnal was moved by this sincere sorrow. His brow was pale, and tears rolled down his cheek.

Emile stamped with rage.

"Do not afflict yourselves thus," at last said the chief, "I have promised to save you, and I hope to succeed. I will employ all my power, only allow me to act. Courage and hope."

"Yes, thank God!" cried Emile, who could no longer contain himself, "I have confidence in you. Be comforted, then, Madame, and you also señorita, the position of affairs is improving. Rejoice, instead of weeping like this. Instead of one friend you have two."

By a spontaneous movement, the two ladies held out their hands to the young man.

"Chief!" said the marchioness, "After God, who sees us, and who judges us, all my hopes are in you. I will not speak to you

of gratitude."

"Thank you, Madame," answered the chief, with dignity, "Whatever happens, do not despair."

At this moment they heard a great noise in the camp. Dove's Eye ran towards them.

"What has happened?" asked Arnal.

"Brother, the great chief Tarou Niom enters the camp," answered she.

"I will go and receive him. You, child, remain here till I ask for you."

It was, indeed, Tarou Niom, who had arrived at the camp, at the head of a troop of about fifteen hundred warriors, who were all well mounted and armed with guns.

Tarou Niom was received with all the honours usual in such a case. Then, after having given the order to his warriors to instal the camp near that of their brothers, he entered the council hut, preceded by Arnal.

The interview between the two chiefs was long. When, at last, they left the council tent, the brow of Tarou Niom was thoughtful.

The two chiefs traversed the camp, saluted by the warriors, who pressed upon them as they walked, and proceeded to the enramada, where were the marchioness and her daughter.

Warned by Emile of the approach of the captains, the ladies hastened to meet them.

"Here," said Arnal, pointing to the three, "are the persons for whom I have sought the protection of my brother."

"It is granted to them," said Tarou Niom, courteously. "Let my friends be reassured; Tarou Niom loves them; he knows how to defend them."

Then, according to the Indian custom, the two chiefs entered the enramada.

"I am hungry," said Tarou Niom.

Tyco, who followed with an unquiet eye the movements of the two chiefs, immediately appeared with provisions, which he spread before them.

Tarou Niom invited the two ladies to sit near him. Emile sat near Arnal, and the meal commenced.

Dove's Eye had flown off, light as a bird, as soon as she had seen the direction that the chiefs took.

The captains ate with a good appetite, praising the very simple dishes, however, and several times making Tyro pour out some drink.

In about half an hour the chiefs rose.

"I thank my brothers for their hospitality," said Tarou Niom; "if they permit me, I will return to visit their dwelling."

"We shall be happy and honoured by it," answered Emile, for himself and his companions.

After various compliments, the chiefs took leave, and went out.

"You see that I do not lose any time," said Arnal.

The latter grasped his hand with affection, and they separated.

The Indians grouped without had seen their two principal

chiefs eat with the strangers. Henceforth the latter were sacred for them; the pact was sealed.

At the end of eight days the number of Indians concealed in the forest amounted to nearly 15,000 men; it was no longer a detachment, but a veritable army.

Tarou Niom had several times visited the foreigners, and shared their meals. The latter, therefore, enjoyed great consideration.

Each day Arnal made them a visit. Only when Emile, uneasy at the movement which he observed around him, tried to address some questions to him, in order to know what passed, the chief closed his mouth.

"Do not disturb yourself about anything; we are preparing for you a charming surprise."

The young man was obliged to content himself with this inconclusive answer.

Tyro, in his capacity as an Indian, ferreted end listened everywhere, but the secret was well kept.

At last, one day after a council, at which all the chiefs had been present, and which lasted all the morning, the various detachments which had come to join that of Gueyma went away, one after the other, in different directions. That of Tarou Niom left the glade the last, divided into three corps of five hundred men each.

Tarou Niom and Arnal, however, remained at the camp, again reduced to its primitive proportions.

CHAPTER XVIII

ZENO CABRAL

Meanwhile the gauchos had left the woods, and had retaken, at a smart pace, the path which was to lead them to the Rio Dulce, until they heard the gallop of a horse.

This invisible horse annoyed them considerably. After some minutes hesitation, they resolved to make their minds clear on the subject, and to know definitely how to act towards the horseman. They therefore turned their bridles, and boldly stood athwart the path.

Scarcely had they assumed this warlike position five minutes, than they perceived in the pale light of the stars the black outline of a horseman.

"Hola!" cried a mocking voice to them; "Hola, caballeros, I am a friend!"

"Eh! It appears to me that I know that voice," said Mataseis.

"It is not unknown to me," answered Sacatripas.

"Eh!" cried the horseman, "They are model brothers, my worthy friends, the Señores Metaseis and Sacatripas. Delighted to meet you, gentlemen."

"Ha!" cried they, "It is his Excellency Don Zeno Cabral; this is a curious rencontre."

"Upon my word, yes," gaily answered the latter. "It is

extraordinary, I admit."

"As the breeze begins to be sharp, we were just preparing to camp when we saw your Excellency."

"Good; if I do not discommode you, I will keep you company."

They then alighted, gathered some dry branches, with which the ground was strewed in great quantity, and they had soon lighted a fire, unsaddled and secured their horses, and were seated before the flame of their fire.

Each drew out some provisions from his alforjas, a kind of double pocket that horsemen carry behind their saddles. These provisions, were spread out in common, and the three companions, who had so fortuitously met – or at least they thought so – began to eat with a good appetite, every now and then taking large bumpers of white brandy, and then, their supper finished, they lighted their cigarettes.

"Well, señores," said Zeno Cabral, "now that we have had a good meal, what do you say to talk a bit?"

"People always gain by talking with a man like your Excellency," sententiously replied Mataseis.

"You speak more truly than you think, perhaps. So you have been dismissed, then, by that Frenchman?"

"Alas, yes."

"At least he paid you?"

"We have nothing to claim from him, your Excellency."

"Then you are open to execute a mission for me."

"We know that you are very generous, your Excellency; will you tell us what it is, and if we can do it we will."

"The mission with which I wish to charge you is not difficult. I have a despatch to send to General Don Eusebio Moratín; if you could undertake this, I confess you would greatly serve me."

"And why should we refuse to charge ourselves with it, your Excellency?"

"I do not know; you know your own affairs better than I do, and you know if it is possible."

The partisan's proposition was all the more agreeable to the gauchos, as they wanted a pretext to introduce themselves to the general. This despatch would naturally make their path smoother; moreover, recommended by Zeno Cabral, they would awaken no suspicion, and were sure of being well received.

"Well," resumed Zeno Cabral, after a pause, "what do you say?"

"We will take the despatch, your Excellency."

"Bear in mind that it must be given to General Moratín himself."

"We will give it into his own hands."

"Hum! That is, perhaps, too much to exact," murmured the partisan to himself; "I am going to write the despatch by the light of the fire; and you will permit me to offer you ten ounces."

"We accept it with gratitude, your Excellency," joyously answered the gauchos.

Zeno Cabral drew from his alforjas a little travelling

companion, containing ink, pens, and paper, and immediately proceeded with his despatch, which he then folded, sealed, and handed to Mataseis.

"Now," said he, "there are the ten ounces; I rely on your attention."

"Consider it as good as done, your Excellency," answered Mataseis, pocketing the money.

In a few minutes the three men wrapped themselves in their skins and blankets, stretched their feet towards the fire, and were soon asleep.

"If these fellows do not now succeed in being received by Moratín," said the partisan, "they must be very awkward."

When the gauchos awoke at break of day, they were alone; Zeno Cabral had gone, having taken French leave.

The gauchos easily reconciled themselves to this want of politeness; they were paid in advance, and very well paid too.

We will briefly say that they met General Moratín at Santiago del Estero, and that they found no difficulty in being incorporated in the general's escort.

To the questions that the general and M. Dubois addressed them on this subject, they replied that they knew the desert in its most secret paths.

We will now abandon the Señores Mataseis and Sacatripas, and will return to Zeno Cabral.

While the gauchos were plotting, in company of Don Pablo Pincheyra, the death of General Moratín, Zeno Cabral, who at

a distance had perceived them at the moment when they left the tent to ensconce themselves in the thicket, had concealed his horse, and, cutting across country, had proceeded to the spot where they were.

Zeno had been invisibly present, not only at the serio-comic turns of fortune in their game at monte, but also had heard every syllable of their conversation with the Pincheyra. It is notable that the projects of Don Pablo squared with his own, for a smile of satisfaction played on his lips at this unexpected revelation.

His negotiation terminated, the partisan had immediately resolved on quitting the bad company, to meet with which he had been compelled to go out of his way.

Loud snoring soon told him the gauchos soundly slept; then he rose stealthily, saddled his horse, leaped in the saddle without touching the stirrup, and, despite the darkness, rapidly galloped off across the desert.

This journey, made at such an hour in the darkness in so wild a region, would probably have been fatal to anyone but the bold Montonero.

The whole night passed thus. At the break of day the Montonero had made twenty leagues and crossed two rivers.

His horse, knocked up with fatigue, stumbled at every step; and the Montonero was obliged to stop if he would not have his horse fall dead under him.

He halted on the border of a wood, removed the harness from his horse, rubbed him down vigorously with a handful of dry

grass, washed his nostrils, withers, and legs with water mixed with brandy, and then let him free.

The animal neighed two or three times with pleasure, and rolled himself with delight on the grass.

"It is four o'clock," said he, examining the sky; "at nine o'clock I will set off; now for some sleep." With that self-control which certain exceptional natures possess, he closed his eyes and soon slept. At nine o'clock exactly, as he had promised himself, he awoke.

He drew from his alforjas the horn of a wild bull, poured water in it to two-thirds of its capacity, added some sugar and some harina tostada or parched meal, and with a spoon he mixed it so as to make it a kind of broth. He then with great gusto swallowed this singular compound, which in these countries forms the principal nourishment of the poorer classes. This frugal meal ended, he lighted his cigarette and fell into a brown study.

A few minutes afterwards he set off. As he had done during the night, he did not follow – we will not say any marked route, for such routes do not exist in these regions – any pathway at all. He pushed right ahead, in the Indian fashion, neither swerving to the right nor to the left, leaping obstacles which rose before him, crossing rivers wherever he met with them, or scampering through ravines and quagmires, always following without deviation the right line he had marked out for himself.

For six days he travelled thus without meeting any incidents worthy of remark. On the evening of the sixth day he reached

a somewhat elevated hill, the summit of which was only shaded by a single tree.

This position was marvellously chosen to serve for an observatory. From it the Montonero completely commanded the plain, and his eye could extend on all sides as far as the distant blue of the horizon, without anything disturbing his view.

This time Zeno Cabral, after having rubbed down his horse, instead of giving him his liberty as he had done each evening, kept on his harness, with the exception of the bridle to allow him to feed, tied him to a picket strongly planted in the earth, and on a blanket spread on the ground he placed a ration of maize – a feast that the horse evidently appreciated, for, having neighed with pleasure, he proceeded to eat heartily.

The young man looked at him a short time, patting him and speaking gently to him – caresses that the noble animal seemed to receive with gratitude. The Montonero then, having supped without even sitting down, rapidly descended the hill, on the summit of which burned his solitary watch fire, and penetrated hastily into the underwood, looking attentively round him, and seeking, by the rays of the setting sun, something to which he appeared to attach great importance.

For about an hour he devoted himself to an active search, walking cautiously round the hill. He then stopped, uttering a cry of joy. He had at last found what he wanted. Before him rose a group of the *Amyris elemifera*, or balsam tree, commonly called by the Indians "candle wood." The Indians cut the branches, and

sometimes the shrub itself, making use of it as a kind of torch. The light given by these torches is brilliant and strong, and the torch itself lasts a considerable time.

Zeno Cabral felled with his sabre several of these branches, stripped them of their leaves, made a bundle of them, which he placed on his shoulder, and again ascended to the summit of the hill.

Meanwhile the sun had disappeared, and the day had been almost without any transition replaced by night.

Darkness soon blinded all objects, drowned all the features of the landscape, and the desert was covered as with a funeral winding sheet.

The Montonero, seated before the fire, with his back leaning on the trunk of the tree, in the position the most comfortable he could secure, warmed his feet carelessly, smoking his cigarette.

Suddenly a shrill whistle rent the air.

At the same moment Zeno Cabral started up as if moved by a spring.

Rekindling the half-extinguished embers of the fire, on which he threw an armful of dead wood, he picked up a branch of balsam tree, lighted it, walked to the commencement or the slope of the hill, and then, having rapidly waved it above his head, he threw it in the air, where it traced a long streak of fire.

Almost immediately a second whistle, but nearer, was heard.

Zeno Cabral took a second torch, and lighting it, he waved it above his head, and darted it into the air, like the first.

This signal given, the partisan returned to his fire, passed his pistols in his girdle, took his gun, on which he leaned, and waited.

He did not wait long. In about five minutes the sound of steps and a trembling of the grass indicated that several persons were approaching.

"Has the moon of wild oats already so far advanced that the darkness is so thick?" said a voice.

"It is easy to procure light," answered Zeno Cabral, lighting a torch, and raising it above his head.

"The night is cold; here is fire; warm yourselves."

"Thank you," answered one of the men: "fire is good at this hour of the night."

The persons who had arrived then entered the circle of light spread by the torch. Two wore the costume of Guaycurus chiefs; they were Gueyma and the Cougar. The third, dressed in the European fashion, was no less than Don Sylvio Quiroga.

"Thanks be given to these caballeros," said he, after respectfully bowing to his chief; "I think that they are nyctalopes, and that, like cats and other animals, they have the faculty of seeing in the dark. I was completely lost when they met me, and was groping like a blind man rudely striking myself against the trees."

"Well, rest yourself, Don Sylvio, while I talk with these caballero," answered the Montonero, laughing, "and warm yourself at the same time."

"I should not like to be indiscreet, general."

"Do not fear that, my friend; we shall converse in a language that you will not understand."

"As that is the case, I will venture," answered the old soldier.

The Indians had remained motionless and indifferent to this short conversation.

"Will you be seated near me, captains," said Zeno Cabral; "I am happy to see you."

When the visitors were seated, Zeno Cabral, after offering them tobacco, which they accepted, resumed —

"Chiefs, you some days ago asked an interview with me; here I am at your orders. Will you, therefore, give me your views, as you know as well as I do how time presses."

"Señor Don Zeno Cabral, for many a year we have known one another," answered the Cougar.

"Yes," said the partisan, whose brow lowered; "it is you, Diogo, who, when I was still young, came through a thousand perils to tell me of the sad death of my sister. From that day we have constantly been in relations with each other. I will add, Diogo," he said, with suppressed emotion, "that I have never met a heart more devoted, a friend more sincere than you, or a soul more grand and noble."

"I have done my duty towards you, and towards my mistress, Señor Don Zeno."

"On one point, Diogo — on one only — I may have reason to reproach you. You have never told me how my poor sister died, or where is her grave."

"Caballero," answered Diogo, with ill-concealed embarrassment, "a solemn oath closes my mouth. But a day will come when you will know all."

Zeno Cabral's head sank despondingly, and he did not answer.

"Will you permit me, your lordship," said the Cougar, "to resume the conversation where we left off?"

The partisan made a gesture of acquiescence.

"Your lordship," said the captain, "the time has come to instruct Gueyma in what he ought to know. This is the only reason which has induced me to ask for this interview."

"Oh, señor," cried Gueyma, with all the impulsiveness of youth, "I entreat you, in the name of the friendship that you appear to have for me, speak, that I may at last know who I am."

"My boy," sadly replied Zeno Cabral, "are you not happy as you are? Of what use is it to bring trouble to your heart, and open a gulf in which all your happiness will disappear? Alas! Knowledge kills. Keep your careless ignorance; you are young."

The young chief had listened to these words with an impatience.

"You knew my family, did you not? Who was my father?"

"A Portuguese nobleman, belonging to one of the principal families of the kingdom."

"And my mother?"

"A Portuguese, as noble as she was beautiful."

"So I belong to the white race?"

"Yes."

"I feared it," murmured the young man; "but how is it that I have been brought up by the Guaycurus?"

"After the death of your mother, cowardly assassinated under the suspicion of a fault which she did not commit, I carried you away myself, to snatch you from the implacable hatred of a man who wished to kill you, and gave you to the care of Diogo."

"I thank him," said the young man, with wild energy; "but that race I hate; I am ashamed to belong to it, since the murderer of my mother was a member of it."

"It was a white," answered Zeno Cabral.

"Good! I do not wish ever to know," replied he, with energy, "what is the name of my family. What does it matter to me? I call myself Gueyma; I am a child of the Guaycurus; this name and title are sufficient. I do not wish any other."

"Gueyma," said Zeno, "you are a good-hearted man, I love you."

"One word more only," continued the young man. "Does the assassin of my mother still live?"

"He does."

"Will you aid me to find him?"

"I will confront him with you."

"Thank you, Don Zeno Cabral; that is all I wished to know."

And, rising with the spring of a wild beast, the young man darted down the slope of the hill, and disappeared, even before his friends could try and retain him.

"The young man has a noble heart," murmured the partisan.

"Yes," pursued Diogo, "his is a fine and noble nature; his heart will be broken."

"And will not mine be so?" significantly asked the Montonero.

"But let us talk of business."

The conversation then changed, and was entirely confined to the events in which Zeno Cabral and Diogo had been so long engaged.

Then, when the two men had decided on the measures which they thought necessary to the success of their dark projects, the captain withdrew, and Zeno Cabral remained alone with Don Sylvio Quiroga.

CHAPTER XIX

CATASTROPHE

From the refreshing morning breeze which played in his hair, and calmed his burning brow, Zeno Cabral appeared to draw new life. He stood up boldly; the wrinkles which had furrowed his face disappeared; his beautiful countenance regained its ordinary calmness; and, had not a livid paleness been visible on his features, certainly no one would have guessed the terrible storm which for so many hours had agitated his heart.

With a piercing look he examined the landscape, which the evening before he could but half see through the last hours of the day.

That plain, encircled by high and snowy mountains, which masked the horizon; that river with its silvery waves, which cut it into two nearly equal parts; those umbrageous woods, scattered here and there, as far as the hill, on the summit of which he had so magnificent a prospect – the least feature, in fact, recalled completely the landscape which was so engraven on his memory.

This place was that which he had wished to reach, and towards which, for so many days, he had so furiously galloped.

A smile of sad satisfaction half-opened his pale lips, for by certain undulations of the grass – undulations which would have been imperceptible by anyone but himself – he saw that

Diogo had not been deceived; that his allies were already at their post, and that this plain, apparently so tranquil and so solitary, would soon be animated and excited at a cry from himself; that thousands of men, now crouching concealed in the grass, would suddenly arise, and would bound with their war cry at his first signal.

"At last!"

The expression summed up a life of struggle to arrive at an end, now to be gained.

He remained some short time pensive; then, proudly raising his head, he passed his hand over his forehead, as if to chase away some importunate thought, and rapidly approached the fire, before which the old officer was still stretched, sleeping.

For a minute or two he contemplated, with envy perhaps, the calm sleep of his old companion in arms, and he then gently nudged him with his foot.

"Eh!" cried Don Sylvio, rubbing his eyes, and looking round him with a frightened air, "I thought I had been sleeping."

"Yes, a little," answered the Montonero, smiling, "for seven or eight hours nearly."

"As much as that!" cried the old soldier.

"A little more, perhaps; I won't answer for the exact time."

"Oh, general!" cried the captain, in a sad voice, "I shall never forgive myself."

"Where do you see any want of respect in that, my dear Quiroga; you were fatigued with a long journey, made on foot,

in the dark."

"But I should have been awakened, general."

"What for?"

"The fact is, general, if I must confess it," said he, candidly, "it is a long time since I had so good a turn."

"Ah! You are quite right; now let us think of our business a little. The squadron has arrived?"

"Yes, general, two days since; it has encamped in a pretty thick wood, situated near the river."

"Better and better. Is this encampment far from here?"

"A league at the most, general," he added.

"That's right. Come, we had better go there at once. You know the way?"

"Oh, by daylight I do not fear to miss my road."

And they set out side by side.

"What! Do you not mount horse, general?"

"No, I prefer to lead him by the bridle."

"As you like, general; I will do what suits you."

"Since you have been here, have you received any messages?"

"One only, general."

"Ah! Ah! And from whom?" asked the Montonero, with some little anxiety.

"From Don Juan Armero."

"And what is this message, my old friend?"

"News that I think will give you pleasure, general. Don Juan Armero tells us that he is not more than twenty-five leagues from

here, and that he hopes to arrive tomorrow morning at latest."

"The devil! Then I have done well to make haste. Does he say by whom he is accompanied?"

"Certainly, general; they are the same as you expected – that is to say, General Don Eusebio Moratín and the Frenchman, his myrmidon."

"Yes, yes; I know the persons alluded to," answered Don Zeno, rubbing his hands with good humour; "these rascals are of my acquaintance."

"Then you are satisfied, general? All happens as you wished?"

"I could not have anything better, my old friend."

"Then away with melancholy!" cried the captain, with a joyous air; "Care would kill a cat."

The general burst out laughing at this unusual sally of Don Sylvio Quiroga, and they continued their journey, talking of one thing and another.

They soon arrived at the wood in which the squadron was encamped, and in a few minutes found themselves in the glade.

In the absence of Don Sylvio, the oldest officer of the corps, the squadron was commanded by Don Estevan Albino.

The young officer received his chief with great demonstrations of joy.

"You, of course, did not expect me so soon, Don Albino?" said the Montonero.

"Pardon me, general; half an hour ago your approach was signalled to me by the sentinels."

"You keep a good lookout?"

"We obey your orders."

"I am satisfied, Don Albino. Your arrangements are well made; you have shown yourself in this matter an officer of experience and foresight."

"You are a thousand times too good, general," answered the young man, blushing with pleasure.

Towards the evening another message from Don Juan Armero announced that, on account of an accident, General Moratín would not arrive for three days.

This news, far from annoying Zeno Cabral, gave him great satisfaction as he had been informed, in another quarter, that the Brazilians would not be at the rendezvous till the same time. This singular coincidence, giving him time to make his final plans, perfectly squared with them.

The two following days were employed by Zeno Cabral in incessantly reconnoitering the plain, so as to assure himself of the positions occupied by his allied detachments, and enable him to modify those of which he did not approve.

If we may use the expression, the plain, although apparently still unpeopled, was literally bristling with troops; all the friendly or vassal tribes to the Guaycurus had sent their contingents. The Guaycurus, in order to be ready for any event, had even decided to despatch their last detachment – that commanded by Gueyma and Diogo, or the Cougar.

Some twenty warriors, under the orders of Arnal, were

stationed in the glade to protect the French painter and the two ladies.

The young man with the curiosity of an artist, and much interested in all that was passing round him, had earnestly entreated Tarou Niom to be allowed to follow him. The chief, who was much pleased with the disposition of the young man, had given way and had consented to take him, as well as Tyro. Arnal had remained alone at the camp with Dove's Eye, the marchioness, and Doña Eva.

The evening before the day on which General Moratín was to arrive Zeno Cabral went to pay a visit to Tarou Niom.

The great chief of the Guaycurus received the Montonero with the greatest honour and marks of the highest esteem and friendship.

Emile, who, since he had lived among the Indians, had by degrees adapted himself to their customs, could not at all understand this reception.

Zeno Cabral, however, on perceiving the young man, had run towards him with outstretched arms, apparently delighted to see him again; and then, turning to Tarou Niom, he highly praised the courage and good nature of the Frenchman.

Emile, constrained to reply to these expressions of friendship, had only done so with a certain coolness that the partisan did not appear to remark. At last Zeno Cabral took his leave, and withdrew.

Zeno Cabral passed the limit of the camp of the Guaycurus,

and was walking in a wild beast path when he heard a call twice in a low voice.

"Who calls me?" answered he, stopping.

"I," answered someone immediately.

"Gueyma!" said the Montonero, with astonishment.

"Yes, señor," answered the young man, "it is me."

"What do you want with me, my friend?"

"You remember that tomorrow the five days expire."

"I remember, my friend. You demand then that I keep my promise?"

"I wish to know the assassin of my mother," said he, with a sad earnestness.

Zeno Cabral looked at him with gentle compassion.

"Your mother! You did not know her," said he.

"Shadowy as may be the memories of my early infancy," answered the young man, with a sad voice, "a child cannot forget a mother, when he has been happy enough to receive her gentle caresses. Often," added he, seizing abruptly the arm of the Montonero, "in my sleep I think I see her smiling face leaning towards me; her large blue eyes, full of tears, fix on me a look of ineffable sweetness; her long brown hair floats in disorder on her snowy shoulders; she murmurs words that I cannot understand; but I feel my heart swell with joy and happiness."

Zeno Cabral listened to the young man with a surprise that he did not try to conceal.

"Oh! Don Zeno," resumed the young man, with an accent of

earnestness impossible to describe, "you think I did not know my mother! If she were to appear here before us at this moment, I should recognise her," added he, with an accent of intense tenderness.

With an abrupt movement Don Zeno drew his arm from under his poncho, and holding out a medallion to the young man:

"Look!" said he.

"My mother!" cried the chief.

But the emotion that this un hoped-for sight had produced was too much; a terrible reaction ensued; the young man grew frightfully pale, he staggered, and fainted. Don Zeno disappeared.

The next day, about an hour before sunrise, the encampment of the Montoneros presented at once one of the most singular and picturesque sights.

The signal to arouse had been given to the squadron by Zeno Cabral, and the officers went from soldier to soldier to awaken them, which the latter did with very ill grace, grumbling, stretching themselves, and yawning almost enough to displace their jaws, declaring that daylight had not yet come.

But at last, willing or not, in some ten minutes' time everybody was astir.

The squadron of Zeno Cabral was, perhaps, the finest and the best organised of all the Banda Oriental; it was composed of about six hundred men, all chosen carefully by their chief, their courage having been tried. It was, in fact, for a squadron formed

only of volunteers, a first-rate corps.

When the sun at last appeared above the horizon all the soldiers were fresh, in good condition, completely armed, and ready to fight.

The general, as they called their chief, passed them carefully in review, to assure himself personally that all was in good order.

The breakfast finished, the nostrils of the horses were covered with cloths to prevent them neighing, and on a sign from Zeno Cabral each man went immediately to occupy a post which had been previously assigned him.

Five minutes later all the Montoneros had disappeared; there remained in the glade only Zeno Cabral and his staff.

Precautions had been so well taken – the orders of the partisan executed with so much intelligence – that it would have been impossible for even the most skilful Indian to guess that a numerous corps of cavalry had for several days camped in this spot.

Several hours passed without any cracking of branches or any trembling of the vegetation taking place to reveal the presence of the invisible watchers.

Then the sound of a voice and of horses was heard without, and six men entered the glade.

We already know these six men; we almost know what motive brought them into this place.

We have reported how their conversation was suddenly interrupted at its commencement by the unexpected appearance

of Zeno Cabral.

The astonishment with which they were struck at the sight of the celebrated and bold Montonero cannot be described.

The latter enjoyed his triumph for a time.

"Eh! What, señores, you do not wish to continue the interesting conversation that I so awkwardly interrupted? Do you, then, find my presence among you out of place? Or do you think that I do not take to heart as much as you do the interests of the country?"

He was silent, appearing to await an answer; but the persons most interested in the strife had not yet sufficiently recovered from the emotion they had experienced to be certain of answering to advantage.

Zeno Cabral shrugged his shoulders.

"What! General Don Eusebio Moratín! You have not a word of welcome for me? Nor you either, Señor Dubois? Ah! my masters, do you know that this begins to look very strange to me; I see uniforms which ought not to appear here. Can I be deceived, and, thinking that I have come among friends, can I have fallen amongst conspirators?"

"Treason!" cried the general, "What is it you dare to say, señor? Do you forget to whom you are speaking?"

"I forget nothing, señor," coldly answered the Montonero; "would there be anything extraordinary in the former bandit of the Pampas becoming today the traitor of his country for the sake of gold?"

Don Eusebio drew out his sword, uttering a cry of rage, and made a movement to throw himself on the bold Montonero.

But the latter, without taking his eye from him, took a pistol from his girdle.

"If you stir, I will shoot you," said he, coolly.

Don Eusebio stopped, grinding his teeth.

"Who is that man?" then said the Brazilian general. "Don Sebastiao, arrest that fellow, I beg."

Zeno Cabral turned towards him like a wounded lion.

"Help, my friends!" cried Don Eusebio; "Fire on that wretch!"

"Silence!" resumed the partisan, in a firm voice.

"But, señor," observed M. Dubois, in a conciliating tone, "you are acting very strangely; you are completely wanting in consideration to –"

"Silence!" a second time called Zeno Cabral; "However well taken may be your precautions; however far you may have come, so as to secretly plot your treason, for a long time I have been watching you, but I wanted to take you in the very act. Throw away your swords, gentlemen; you are my prisoners."

"Your prisoners! You are joking!" cried they.

"It is time!" cried Don Armero, who up to this time had remained a silent, but not disinterested, witness of the scene.

Zeno Cabral had not made a movement. At the cry of Juan Armero the glade had, as if by magic, filled with soldiers.

Don Roque and Don Eusebio saw that they were lost. Followed by Don Sebastiao, who had boldly placed himself at

their side, a pistol in one hand and a sword in the other, they rushed on the nearest Montoneros, and tried to force a passage.

There was a moment of frightful tumult, mixed with cries and imprecations of rage or pain – the sound of firearms – a hurried tramping – and then calmness suddenly ensued.

Don Eusebio, his left arm broken by a ball, was lying on the ground, tightly bound with a lasso; Don Roque and Don Sebastiao, both unwounded, were also bound, and crouching on the ground, at a few paces from General Moratín; as to M. Dubois, at the moment when he drew two pistols from his pocket and prepared, though he was no soldier, to sell his life dearly, he had received a ball in the middle of the forehead, and was lying dead.

Mataseis and Sacatripas tried to gain the money which they had received; they alone had drawn, Zeno Cabral having given the order to seize the conspirators without wounding them, if possible.

The partisan then approached the prisoners.

"Do you now admit that you are in my power?" said he.

"All is not yet finished," answered the marquis, with disdain;

"I have not come here alone; I have troops – "

"Listen," said Zeno Cabral to him, sharply interrupting him.

At this moment a horrible clamour arose in the plain.

"What is that?" cried the marquis, with alarm.

"The war cry of Indians," coldly answered the partisan – "who are massacring your soldiers."

"Oh, it is not – it cannot be – my soldiers are brave, they will defend themselves," cried the general.

"They will be massacred," pursued Zeno Cabral, "and those who will escape the massacre will be burned alive."

"Burned alive!" cried he.

"Do you not see that, for some time, the air is rarefied; the Indians have fired the plain;" and turning towards the Montoneros, "To horse!" cried he, in a thundering voice, "To horse! We have scarcely the time to escape!"

"Oh! These men are wild beasts!" cried the marquis.

"Did you not know that people cannot invade the sacred territory of the Guaycurus with impunity?"

"It is true," murmured the marquis, appearing, rather to reply to his own thoughts than to the words of the Montonero.

"Give me your word of honour not to try and escape," said Zeno Cabral, "and you will be free in a moment from all constraint."

"I give it you," answered the marquis, despondingly.

His bonds immediately fell, like those of Don Sebastiao Vianna, who had also given his word.

General Don Eusebio, since he had been in the power of the Montoneros, had maintained a sullen silence; the only answer that they obtained from him, when they proposed to him to give his word, was confined to these words, "Go to the devil!"

They were obliged to carry him away, and to tie him as well as they could on horseback.

Meanwhile time pressed; it was necessary to hasten away; the air became more and more rarefied; a suffocating heat was felt; thick volumes of smoke rolled over the glade; showers of sparks were rained upon the trees; the shrubbery began to burn; there was not a moment to lose.

Zeno Cabral placed himself at the head of his troop, having at his side Don Roque and Don Sebastiao, and having cried "Advance!" in a thundering voice, he rode at full speed across the glade.

The entire plain, for a distance of more than ten leagues, became an immense lake of flame, in the midst of which the Indians, half naked, looked like so many demons, leaping and brandishing their arms, and uttering cries like wild beasts.

The Brazilian troops – entrenched on the hill where they had established their camp, circled by an impenetrable wall of fire, kept up a continual and well-sustained fire on the Indians, not in the hope of conquering them, but so that they might die bravely, and make their wild and implacable enemies pay dearly for their victory.

Zeno Cabral gave the order to halt, to allow their horses to regain their wind.

They stopped. The Brazilians still fought, or at least they continued to fire, for they had no longer any enemy; the Indians were flying in all directions, in their turn pursued by the fire which they had themselves lighted.

Suddenly a frightful explosion was heard; an immense cloud

of dust, fragments of rock, and broken trees, rose in the air to a prodigious height, and fell with a crash.

The Brazilians had disappeared. They had fired the powder, and had blown themselves up, to put an end to this horrible tragedy.

CHAPTER XX

CONCLUSION

Ten days had passed since this frightful catastrophe. In an arid and sandy plain, on the borders of a lake, the stagnant and blackish waters of which seemed stamped with immobility, a troop of some thirty horsemen had established a temporary camp.

The horsemen of whom we speak had arrived in this spot scarcely two hours. A part of them wore the European costume, while the others were dressed in the Indian manner.

The first were Zeno Cabral, the Marquis de Castelmelhor, Emile Gagnepain, the Marchioness de Castelmelhor and her daughter, Doña Eva.

Ten Montoneros, probably serving as an escort, and commanded by Don Sylvio Quiroga, had established themselves a little way off.

The number of the Indians was greater than that of the whites; they also formed a separate encampment under the orders of Tarou Niom, Diogo, Gueyma, and Arnal.

All the persons of whom we speak had, on the invitation of Zeno Cabral, come with him to this desolate spot, without even suspecting the motives which had led the Montonero to bring them there.

Zeno Cabral, who for nearly an hour had been in conference with Diogo and Gueyma, at last came out of the enramada; and the two chiefs followed him, with downcast eyes and sad countenances.

With a gesture, Zeno Cabral called all his friends around him.

"Come, señor marquis," said the partisan; "and you also, Madame – and you, señorita."

These three persons, who till then had remained a little distance off, then came forward. Emile and Tyro immediately placed themselves without ceremony near the ladies.

Zeno Cabral feigned not to observe this movement.

Each one waited with secret anxiety for what was about to transpire; the silence was so profound and solemn that the flight of a bird, if there had been any birds in that desolate plain, would have been heard.

Zeno Cabral at last raised his head, which till that moment had fallen sorrowfully on his breast; his face was livid, his eyes were hollow and bloodshot; he was a prey to emotion so violent that his whole body was agitated with convulsive movements.

"Friends," said he, in a sad tone, "I thank you for having consented to follow me here, where a great act of justice and of expiation is to be performed. Many years have passed since the day when that crime was committed, to be the avenger of which is my terrible task; it is in this place, which none of you knew before coming here with me, that this vengeance is to be accomplished."

Then, after a moment of silence, he added, turning towards the general:

"Marquis de Castelmelhor, you remember the unfortunate Laura?"

"I remember," answered the marquis, in a stifled voice; "I have been criminal and cowardly; I have carried despair and shame into a family which offered me paternal hospitality; in contempt of all divine and human laws, I committed a horrible crime, not only in trying to seize on the fortune of my benefactor, but in robbing him by carrying off his daughter, whom I never loved, but whom I wished to make use of as a means of securing the riches that I coveted."

All the persons present were struck with astonishment on hearing the man speak thus; the marchioness concealed her face; Doña Eva threw herself into the arms of her mother; Zeno Cabral alone remained calm, cold, and impassive.

"So," said he, "you admit you are guilty?"

"Yes; but the crimes of the young man have been atoned for, if such crimes can be, by the honourable and loyal conduct of the man of riper years."

"You lie, Marquis de Castelmelhor," coldly interrupted Zeno Cabral.

"Caballero," cried the general, quickly raising his head, and instinctively carrying his hand to his side, as if to take the sword which was not there.

"You lie," resumed Zeno Cabral; "the mature man has if

possible been more criminal than the young man; he has assassinated the wife of his best friend. Gueyma, there is the assassin of your mother!"

"Oh!" cried the young man.

"The mature man," Zeno Cabral continued, "after having seduced the girl, abandoned her child in the streets of Rio Janeiro, and poisoned her whom he had dishonoured in order to seize on her fortune. The child was saved by me, and confided to the Guaycurus: it was Dove's Eye. The middle-aged man – the general in the service of Brazil – was arrested by me ten days ago, at the moment when he was preparing to sell the interests of his master to another wretch like himself."

With an instinctive movement, the marchioness abruptly seized the arm of her daughter, and snatched her away from the man whom she had so loved, to whom she had sacrificed all, and who she learned was a monster.

The persons present, mute with horror, heard as in a dream the recital of these horrible crimes, so clearly and calmly detailed.

"Thrown in spite of myself on the path of this man," resumed Zeno Cabral; "mixed up unwillingly with his career, I followed him step by step, day by day, for many years; I have no right to call him to account for his crimes, except for one – the most horrible of all – the first. Blood for blood, eye for eye, tooth for tooth – This man killed my sister; I will kill him." Then, placing his right hand on the shoulder of the general, "Marquis de Castelmelhor," continued he, "look around you; there is the

diamond country that you wished to reach, the secret relative to which you sought to steal from my sister, who did not possess it; all the sand which surrounds us for a distance of ten leagues abounds with diamonds; this country belongs to me, for it was discovered by my grandfather, and no one after him has ever seen it; well, rejoice, Marquis de Castelmelhor," cried he, with an accent of terrible irony; "this country I give you; all these diamonds are yours; henceforth you shall possess them forever." Turning then towards the Montoneros: "Dig a hole," said he, in a hollow voice; "this man shall be buried alive on a bed of diamonds!"

At this terrible conclusion, the marchioness uttered a piercing cry, and fell fainting to the ground. Eva became wildly delirious. Emile and Tyro, mad with grief, in vain lavished on the girl and her mother the most devoted attentions.

Meanwhile, according to the order of Zeno Cabral, two Montoneros had proceeded to dig the grave.

The witnesses of this horrible scene exchanged terrified looks, not daring in any other way to express the sentiments which agitated them.

Suddenly Arnal advanced rapidly towards Zeno Cabral.

"Stop, caballero," said he in a firm voice; "stop, take care that you are not criminal yourself, while thinking you are but a judge; vengeance belongs only to God; that man did not kill your sister."

"I have proofs of his crime."

"You cannot have the proofs of that which does not exist,"

pursued Arnal, with energy.

"What do you mean?"

"Your sister is not dead."

This unexpected piece of news, of such powerful interest, completely changed the aspect of the scene, and everyone crowded round him.

"She is alive," cried Tarou Niom.

Arnal let go the hand of the partisan, which, until that time he had held in his own, and looking at him with an expression of pain and of infinite tenderness:

"Oh, men, men!" cried he, with feverish energy, "Will the heart of woman then always remain incomprehensible to you? Will you never be able to read a single page of it? Can you not understand that your sister – that artless and pure child of sixteen years, downcast by the grief of an unmerited shame, succumbing under the weight of a fault that she never committed – did not choose to bend her stainless brow, and to blush before that implacable world for which appearances are everything, and which always thinks the worst? Will you not admit, then, that sublime abnegation which has made her, still living, cut herself off from the world which respects the dead martyr, whom living it would insult?"

"But," cried Zeno Cabral, dumfounded by these words, spoken in a tone of irresistible truthfulness, "who has told you that this is really the case?"

"Who – who?" murmured Arnal, in a feeble and trembling

voice.

And, taking off her hat, she allowed some long and silky brown hair to fall in disorder on her shoulders.

"Laura! My sister!" cried the partisan, rushing towards her.

"My brother! My brother!" murmured she, in a broken voice.

"Courage, my child!" said Tarou Niom, gently.

Suddenly the sound of a pistol was heard; everyone turned with anxiety; the marquis, with his skull fractured, was writhing in agony.

"I have revenged my mother," said Gueyma, coldly, showing the smoking weapon that he still held in his hand.

Laura, notwithstanding the prayers and supplications of her brother, would never consent to abandon the Guaycurus, with whom she had found, for so many years, such constant protection. She lived with Gueyma and Dove's Eye, often visited by her brother.

The marchioness died of grief a few months only after the terrible death of her husband, reproaching herself to her last hour for the love that she had still for his memory. Before her dying hour, she united her daughter to the French painter, whose devotion, under the trying circumstances in which she had found herself, was so valuable.

Emile Gagnepain is Marquis de Castelmelhor, but he can never get accustomed to his title. Every time that it is given to him, he looks round him to see who is being addressed, and then he laughs on perceiving his mistake.

Tyro is his steward.